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**An ethnographic study of how Chinese students  
in a UK university understand and respond to  
emotions in their intercultural adjustment**

**By**

**Weijia Zheng**

**In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**



**School of Education**

**2015**



## **Abstract**

This is an ethnographic study of a group of Chinese students in a UK university and their emotional experiences while they adjust to the host academic and sociocultural environment. The study focuses on these students' understanding of and responses to emotions in their intercultural encounters in this context.

The empirical findings show that: 1) Chinese students' constructions of emotions: seek connections with people in the host environment; value approval in interactions with people in the host environment; pursue competence when performing academic and social tasks; promote positive self-presentation in classroom discussions; seek intimacy in intercultural friendships; and value sincerity in intercultural relationships. These constructions are centred on three aspects: encountering and engaging with the host environment; performing academic and social tasks; and developing interpersonal relationships. 2) Chinese students' ways of responding to emotions involve: changing oneself; changing the environment; and other responses (including emotion-focused coping and the avoidance of emotion eliciting events or situations). 3) There are a variety of sociocultural and historical factors that influence the development of Chinese students' constructions of or responses to emotions in their intercultural adjustment processes: emotional contagion, emotional coincidence, empathy, close proximity, the presence of other Chinese students, a perceived low level of host receptivity, conformity pressure from the Chinese group, being in a disadvantageous position in power imbalanced encounters, habituation with the existing Chinese network, and previous learning experiences.

The findings give valuable insights into Chinese students' affective intercultural adjustment journey, and have practical implications for prospective Chinese international students and intercultural education in higher education, especially in the context of the UK.

## Table of contents

Abstract .....	3
Table of contents .....	4
List of Tables.....	9
List of Figures .....	9
Declaration .....	10
Statement of Copyright .....	10
Acknowledgements .....	11
Dedication .....	12
Chapter 1 Introduction .....	13
1.1 Background of the study and statement of the research problems .....	13
1.2 Significance and purpose of the study.....	14
1.3 Limitations of previous studies and the focus of this study .....	16
1.4 Definitions of key terms .....	19
1.5 Overview of the thesis .....	22
Chapter 2 Literature review .....	25
2.1 Introduction .....	25
2.2 Conceptualizing intercultural adjustment and the significance of studying emotion in intercultural adjustment .....	25
2.3 A review of the relevant concepts, theories, and research .....	28
2.3.1 Concepts and theories of emotions in interpersonal communication .....	28
2.3.2 Theories of intercultural adjustment processes.....	31

2.3.3 Concepts and theories of the affective aspect of intercultural communication and affective intercultural competence .....	39
2.3.4 Concepts and theories of Chinese affective communication .....	43
2.3.5 Empirical research on sojourners' studying abroad and intercultural relationship experiences .....	45
2.4 Conclusions and formulation of research questions .....	48
Chapter summary .....	52
Chapter 3 Research design and methodology .....	56
3.1 Introduction .....	56
3.2 Rationale for a social constructionist paradigm .....	56
3.3 Rationale for an ethnographic approach .....	58
3.4 Data collection instruments, rationale, and processes .....	61
3.4.1 Access to the field .....	61
3.4.2 Pilot study .....	62
3.4.3 The sample .....	63
3.4.4 Participant observation .....	65
3.4.5 Ethnographic interviews .....	69
3.5 Data analysis .....	75
3.5.1 Rationale for a thematic analysis approach .....	75
3.5.2 Issues in the data analysis process .....	76
3.6 Reflexivity .....	81
3.7 Ethical issues .....	85
3.7.1 Informed consent .....	85
3.7.2 Confidentiality .....	86
3.7.3 Intervention and reciprocity .....	87

3.8 Trustworthiness .....	89
3.8.1 Credibility .....	89
3.8.2 Transferability, dependability, and confirmability .....	90
Chapter summary .....	91
Chapter 4 Constructions of emotions in encountering and engaging with the host environment.....	92
4.1 Introduction .....	92
4.2 Constructions of emotions when encountering and interacting with people and the environments in the UK .....	93
4.2.1 Seeking connections with people in the host environment.....	93
4.2.2 Valuing approval in interactions with people in the host environment .....	104
4.2.3 Conclusions.....	107
Chapter summary .....	109
Chapter 5 Constructions of emotions in task performance and interpersonal relationship development .....	112
5.1 Introduction .....	112
5.2 Constructions of emotions in performing academic and social tasks...	112
5.2.1 Pursuing competence in academic and social task performance ...	113
5.2.2 Creating a positive self-presentation in classroom discussions .....	120
5.2.3 Conclusions.....	124
5.3 Constructions of emotions in developing intercultural relationships ...	125
5.3.1 Seeking intimacy in intercultural friendships .....	126
5.3.2 Valuing sincerity in interpersonal intercultural relationships.....	132
5.3.3 Conclusions.....	136



Chapter summary .....	137
Chapter 6 Responses to emotions in intercultural adjustment: Changing oneself .....	139
6.1 Introduction .....	139
6.2 Managing the ways of thinking about the emotion eliciting events or situations.....	140
6.2.1 Encountering the new environment: Promoting open-mindedness and developing self-monitoring skills.....	140
6.2.2 Confronting the adjustment challenges: Guiding thoughts in more desirable directions .....	145
6.2.3 Having confidence in intercultural encounters .....	149
6.2.4 Managing the perceived importance of the events or situations in intercultural communication .....	150
6.2.5 Conclusions.....	155
Chapter summary .....	156
Chapter 7 Responses to emotions in intercultural adjustment: Changing the environment, and other responses .....	158
7.1 Introduction .....	158
7.2 Managing emotion eliciting events or situations.....	159
7.2.1 Actions towards ‘good’ events or situations.....	159
7.2.2 Actions towards ‘bad’ events or situations .....	163
7.2.3 Conclusions.....	170
7.3 Other responses .....	172
7.3.1 Emotion-focused Coping (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).....	172
7.3.2 Avoiding the emotion eliciting events or situations .....	175

7.3.3 Conclusions.....	180
Chapter summary .....	181
Chapter 8 Conclusions .....	182
8.1 Introduction .....	182
8.2 Summary of main findings and contributions to knowledge .....	182
8.3 Theoretical contributions and implications .....	190
8.4 Methodological implications .....	193
8.5 Social and educational implications .....	195
8.5.1 Implications for prospective Chinese international students .....	195
8.5.2 Implications for British universities and university staff.....	196
8.5.3 Implications for intercultural education in higher education.....	197
8.6 Limitations of the study.....	198
8.7 Directions for future research.....	200
Conclusions to the study.....	202
Appendix 1 First round interview guide (Chinese version) .....	203
Appendix 2 First round interview guide (English version) .....	205
Appendix 3 Second round interview guide (Chinese version).....	207
Appendix 4 Second round interview guide (English version) .....	209
Appendix 5 Key information about interviews .....	211
Appendix 6 Observation issues .....	213
Appendix 7 Information sheet for participants.....	214
Appendix 8 Consent form .....	216
Appendix 9 An example of coding in Nvivo 10.....	217
References .....	218

## **List of Tables**

TABLE 1	PROFILES OF THE PARTICIPANT GROUP .....	65
TABLE 2	KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THE TWO ROUNDS OF INTERVIEWS.....	211

## **List of Figures**

FIGURE 1	THE VISUAL ELICITING TOOL IN ETHNOGRAPHIC INTERVIEWS.....	74
FIGURE 2	AN EXAMPLE OF CODING IN NVIVO 10.....	217

## **Declaration**

This PhD thesis is my own work and no part of the material offered in it has previously been submitted for a degree in this or in any other university.

## **Statement of Copyright**

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## Dedication

谨以本论文献给我最挚爱的父母

*This thesis is dedicated to my beloved parents*

## **Chapter 1 Introduction**

This thesis is an ethnographic study of a group of Chinese postgraduate students in a UK university and their emotional experiences of adjusting to the host academic and sociocultural environment. The study focuses on these students' understanding of and responses to emotions in their intercultural encounters in this context. Drawing on the social constructionism theory, this study seeks to reveal the complexities, dynamics, and uniqueness of Chinese international students' affective intercultural adjustment experiences in order to improve the existing understanding of the aims, focuses, and processes of intercultural education.

This chapter begins with an introduction into the sociocultural background against which the present study is conducted, as well as a statement of the research problems in order to set this study in context (1.1). The significance and purpose of this study is then outlined (1.2), followed by a discussion of the limitations of previous studies and a statement of the focus of this study (1.3). The chapter also provides definitions of the key terms adopted in this study (1.4) and concludes with an overview of the structure of the thesis (1.5).

### **1.1 Background of the study and statement of the research problems**

As a result of globalization and an increased willingness to pursue personal development, more and more students have chosen to study abroad in British universities (Brown, 2008). Chinese students form one of the largest national groups on British campuses (Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006). Accordingly, in recent years a large number of studies have emerged with a view to investigating the studying abroad experiences of international students; these studies have presented international students' complex experiences of

encountering new environments in another country, characterized as both positive and negative (e.g., Brown, 2008; Rosenthal et al., 2008; Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006; Ward and Lin, 2010). Many of the issues international students encounter are emotional in nature and concerned with the relations between students and the new environment. For example, Brown's (2008) study of a group of international postgraduate students' adjustment experiences in a UK university depicts students' various emotional experiences regarding entering a new academic and sociocultural environment; these include: fear of the unknown, enjoyment of the new, feeling lonely, feeling stressed, embracing diversity, and so on.

In turn, these emotional experiences may have various sociocultural and psychological implications for international students' intercultural adjustment experiences in the new environment. From a sociocultural perspective, some students experience a lack of communication with the local people and prefer to mix with their co-nationals in order to release the stress triggered by encountering the new academic and sociocultural environment (e.g., Brown, 2008; Holmes, 2005); however, others enjoy the new intercultural friendships they develop with local students (e.g., Kudo and Simkin, 2003). Psychologically, some students' well-being is compromised by academic stress (e.g., Brown, 2008; Robertson et al., 2000), while others display satisfaction in interacting with other overseas students (e.g., Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006). It is therefore evident that studying abroad provides international students with a variety of challenges and opportunities regarding their 'personal and social development in a globalised world' (Council of Europe, 2008).

## **1.2 Significance and purpose of the study**

The opportunities and challenges signified by international students' various emotions evolved during their academic and sociocultural adjustment to the host environment have important implications for international students, as



well as higher education and intercultural communication studies. For international students, the emotions they experience in encounters with the new environment signal the necessity of adjustment which may in turn lead to personal transformation and growth (Planalp, 1999). On the universities' side, they have some responsibility to foster effective intercultural communication by conducting relevant intercultural education programmes (Council of Europe, 2008). Such programmes need to support international students in gaining more positive sojourner experiences in terms of fully engaging with the new environments and reflecting on their experiences towards an enhanced intercultural awareness (Byram, 1997) and a sense of well-being. Universities would benefit from gaining a higher level of awareness of the specific emotional goals and needs of their international students before developing more to-the-point strategies that are sensitive to these goals and needs (Rosenthal et al., 2008).

As a result, a sound understanding of international students' emotional needs and goals, their intercultural adjustment processes, and the issues that emerge in these processes is critical in improving the quality of intercultural education in higher education with the view of fostering students' positive intercultural experiences towards personal development and growth. The value of studying emotions in intercultural communication also lies in its potential to improve the existing understanding of individual sojourners' intercultural adjustment experiences within specific sociocultural contexts. First of all, emotions are closely related to adjustment because they are elicited 'when there is a significant change in the status of our plans, and they alert us to the need to adjust accordingly' (Planalp, 1999, p. 20). In other words, emotions drive individuals to undertake adjustment actions in order to pursue their plans. Second, as emotions prepare the mind and body to take actions in response to situations that trigger the emotions (Planalp, 1999), they affect many 'performance-relevant outcomes including judgments, attitudinal responses, creativity, helping behaviour, and risk taking' (Brief and Weiss, 2002, p. 293). As

such, studying emotions is crucial in the drive towards understanding individuals' adjustment performances. Moreover, emotions shed light on individuals' social and power positions, as well as the status of their important concerns (including needs and goals, interests, and drives), which guide individuals' social actions (Planalp, 1999). Studying emotions therefore reveals what concerns individual sojourners deeply regarding their adjustment to the host environment, as well as how they are likely to act in their adjustment processes. In sum, examining emotions can improve the existing understanding of individual sojourners' agenda, as well as the reasons and processes of their intercultural adjustment experiences.

The study of emotions therefore has important implications for yielding a sound understanding of international students' significant needs, goals, and adjustment experiences, which serve as the basis of improving intercultural education in higher education. As a result, by investigating a group of Chinese international students' emotional experiences of adjusting to the academic and sociocultural environment in a UK university context, this study aims to reveal the needs, goals, motivations, and value orientations that shape and guide the students' unique and complex intercultural adjustment experiences, exploring the effects of affective intercultural adjustment on students' personal growth and transformation, and thereby informing intercultural education in higher education.

### **1.3 Limitations of previous studies and the focus of this study**

Given the importance of studying emotions in individual sojourners' intercultural adjustment experiences, previous intercultural studies have paid little attention to the affective aspect of intercultural adjustment. For example, in the majority of existing intercultural competence models, individual

communicators are largely depicted as cognitive beings that experience no emotions (Spitzberg and Changnon, 2009). In other words, these studies fail to capture a holistic picture of individual sojourners' intercultural adjustment experiences in which emotions play an essential role (as discussed in 1.2).

On the other hand, there are several limitations in previous studies which focus on the emotional aspect of intercultural adjustment. First of all, sojourners' affective adjustment concepts and processes in intercultural communication are mainly understood as stable and predictable events that are studied outside the contexts in which the adjustments occur (e.g., Kim, 2005; Neuliep, 2012; Ward et al., 2001). There is a lack of understanding of individual student sojourners' affective adjustment processes that evolve within specific historical and sociocultural contexts. Previous studies therefore have a tendency to view sojourners' affective intercultural adjustment experiences as events that have definite and static nature that can be accurately described and captured. In fact, as this study will suggest, this perception may not be helpful in grasping the dynamics and uniqueness of individual sojourners' emotional experiences in real-life intercultural adjustment situations.

Second, many of the previous studies are based on an etic perspective, i.e., using concepts and viewpoints developed from ideas found in previous literature, as well as the researcher's own knowledge and judgement, in order to understand sojourners' affective adjustment experiences (e.g., Gudykunst, 2005; Ward and Searle, 1991). It is still unclear as to whether these concepts and/or perspectives are without biases or limitations; or whether they can fully account for all the affective intercultural adjustment phenomena of international students from a specific country. These issues can only be unraveled by the close examination of the affective adjustment experiences of these students from their own perspectives; in other words, from an emic perspective.

Furthermore, previous studies are mainly focused on investigating individuals' negative emotions associated with cultural differences (e.g., anxiety, confusion,

frustration, strain, feeling lost, disgust, and fear), as well as the negative effects of these emotions on their intercultural communication experiences (e.g., stereotyping, discrimination, and avoidance of intercultural contact) (Chen and Starosta, 2005; Gudykunst and Kim, 2003; Neuliep, 2012). There is a lack of a holistic and comprehensive picture of how the processes of developing and managing various kinds of emotions in intercultural communications are socially constructed, thereby suggesting the limitations of previous studies in terms of their restrictive focus of inquiry.

To sum up, viewing intercultural encounters as cognitive, predictable, and decontextualized events means that the majority of previous studies may fail to grasp the complexities, dynamics, or uniqueness of individual sojourners' affective intercultural adjustment experiences from their own perspective. Such a limitation in the current understanding calls for conducting a study characterised by prolonged engagement in the research field through participant observation (i.e., in terms of observing and participating in the research participants' daily activities within the field, such as sharing accommodation in a hall of residence, meeting at meal times in the dining room and in common rooms, meeting on campus, etc.; see section 3.4.4 in Chapter 3 for detailed information), with a view to depicting individual sojourners' daily sociocultural practices in regard to the emotions experienced during their intercultural adjustment processes within specific contexts from their own perspective.

By taking an ethnographic approach, which involves ethnographic interviews and participant observation, this study will therefore examine a group of Chinese taught Masters students' understandings of and responses to emotions in their intercultural encounters in a UK university from their own perspective. This investigation aims to yield an emic understanding of the processes of and reasons for the students' affective intercultural adjustment experiences. Specifically, this research intends to address the following research objectives:

1. To understand Chinese international students' intercultural adjustment concerns and affective adjustment strategies (as revealed by their understanding of and responses to emotions in their intercultural encounters), and the issues that emerge during their affective intercultural adjustment processes;
2. To explore the effects of relevant personal and contextual factors on Chinese students' affective intercultural adjustment experiences, in order to shed light on the (re)construction and (re)negotiation processes of their experiences.

These research objectives provide the basis for identifying the three research questions of this study, which will be presented in Chapter 2.

## **1.4 Definitions of key terms**

Having discussed the research context and the significance, purpose, and focus of this study, I will now turn to the clarification of the key terms of this study.

### *Student sojourners:*

In this study, sojourners are defined as individuals who voluntarily and temporarily stay in a new environment for a relatively short period of time (usually between six months and five years), who are “usually associated with a specific assignment or contract”, and who normally return home after completing their tasks (Ward et al., 2001, p. 21). Accordingly, the phrase “student sojourners” refers to those who stay temporarily abroad “for the duration of their diplomas or degrees” (Ward et al., 2001, p. 21). As returning home is usually anticipated and their stay abroad is at least partly motivated by a clearly-defined instrumental goal in terms of successfully completing their study programmes, student sojourners' adjustment to new environments may demonstrate some specific characteristics distinct from other cultural travellers. For example, Ward et al. (2001, p. 142) argue that student sojourners “are

usually more committed than tourists to their new location, but less involved than immigrants or resettled refugees”. Student sojourners’ motives for adjustment may have implications for understanding their affective adjustment experiences in the new environment.

#### *Culture:*

Culture is a complex concept and there are more than a hundred definitions of culture in the existing social science literature (Brown, 2008). In this study, I will adopt Spitzberg and Changnon’s (2009, p. 6-7) definition of culture: “enduring yet evolving intergenerational attitudes, values, beliefs, rituals/customs, and behavioral patterns into which people are born but that is structurally created and maintained by people’s ongoing actions”. This definition is based on a holistic perspective, which captures both the stable and dynamic sides of culture (Martin and Nakayama, 2010). This study is focused more on the dynamic side with a view to exploring how culture is constantly reproduced, maintained, and modified during individuals’ daily social practice processes occurred in specific sociocultural contexts (Martin and Nakayama, 2010).

#### *Intercultural adjustment:*

In this study, intercultural adjustment is defined as “the entirety of the phenomenon of individuals who, upon relocating to an unfamiliar sociocultural environment, strive to establish and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with the environment” (Kim, 2005, p. 380). This definition views adjustment as a dynamic interplay that occurs between individuals and their environment, thereby highlighting the significance of individuals’ communication activities in their adjustment processes, as communication links individuals and their environment together (Kim, 2005). This definition also indicates the importance of individuals’ own needs and commitments in shaping their adjustment outcomes, and thus provides a useful interpretive lens through which to explore the complexity and intricacies of

individual sojourners' intercultural adjustment processes as will be presented later in this study.

*Emotion:*

Defining emotion is a difficult task as emotions are inherently complex, which vary in many aspects such as functions served (e.g., from basic survival needs to more sophisticated sociocultural needs) and direction of focus (i.e., directed to self or to others) (Metts and Planalp, 2011). Thus, developing a simple and narrow definition of emotion seems neither feasible nor useful in terms of capturing the complexity of emotions. Instead, I aim to outline a perspective towards emotion which I could draw on to create fruitful insights into the phenomena of emotion under study (Oatley and Jenkins, 1996; Svašek, 2010), based on a compare and contrast of the existing views of emotion as will be presented below.

A long-standing view of emotion treats emotions as innate neurological and physiological arousal patterns which take place within the mind and body of an individual (Ekman, 1999; Izard, 2007, 2009) and serve the function of protecting the safety and welfare of a group (Chiao et al., 2008). Such an inner, stable and universal approach to emotions has increasingly been criticized because of its inadequacy in grasping the intricacies of the phenomena of emotion occurring in complicated social contexts (Svašek and Skrbíš, 2007).

In contrast, some authors argue that emotions are generated as individuals evaluate or interpret events or situations in their environment and experience significant changes in the status of their important goals or plans (e.g., Ellsworth and Scherer, 2003; Planalp, 1999). Emotions therefore signal what concerns individuals deeply and how they are likely to respond in certain social situations (Planalp, 1999). Such a view of emotion challenges the idea that emotions reside within individuals, and argues instead that "emotions link what is important for us to the world of people, things, and happenings" (Oatley and Jenkins, 1996, p. 122). It conceptualizes emotions as subtle and emergent processes which are shaped or influenced by both individual agency and the

dynamic features of specific sociocultural contexts (Metts and Planalp, 2011). As such, this view of emotion provides a theoretical lens through which the uniqueness and sociocultural complexity of individual sojourners' emotion experience in intercultural contexts can be explored, which is a good fit with my study focus and will therefore be adopted in this study.

## **1.5 Overview of the thesis**

In this chapter, I have introduced the sociocultural background of this study (1.1); highlighted its significance and purpose (1.2); discussed the limitations of previous studies and outlined the focus of this research (1.3); and defined the key terms used in this study (1.4). In this section, I will conclude this chapter with an overview of the thesis.

In Chapter 2, I will set the study's theoretical scene. I first discuss the issue of conceptualizing intercultural adjustment and establish the significance of studying emotions in intercultural adjustment (2.2). In section 2.3, I review the relevant concepts, theories, and research in order to gain an overall picture of the current understanding relevant to the focus of this study in the existing literature. I discuss five bodies of relevant literature in this section: emotion in interpersonal communication (2.3.1); the intercultural adjustment processes (2.3.2); the affective aspect of intercultural communication and affective intercultural competence (2.3.3); Chinese affective communication (2.3.4); and empirical research on sojourners' studying abroad and intercultural relationship experiences (2.3.5). Informed by this review of previous research, I then conclude with the areas that have been under-explored or ignored in the existing literature on the affective aspect of Chinese international students' intercultural adjustment experiences, followed by the formation of research questions (2.4).

Chapter 3 is the research design and methodology chapter. It begins with the rationale for adopting a social constructionist paradigm (3.2), as well as an



ethnographic approach and longitudinal design (3.3), in order to collect data which better capture the dynamic and uniqueness of Chinese international students' constructions of and responses to emotions in their intercultural encounters. This chapter also provides a detailed description and discussion of data collection (including ethnographic interviews and participant observation; 3.4) and analysis (3.5) processes, along with issues concerning reflexivity (3.6), ethical considerations (3.7), and trustworthiness (3.8).

Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 are findings chapters that provide answers to the three research questions. Chapter 4 presents the participants' constructions of emotions in their general intercultural encounters and engagements within the host environment, including seeking connections with people in the host environment (4.2.1) and valuing approval in interactions with people in the host environment (4.2.2). In Chapter 5, I continue to investigate the participants' constructions of emotions in two specific intercultural contexts, i.e., task performance and interpersonal relationship development. Specifically, the participants' constructions of emotions include pursuing competence when performing academic and social tasks (5.2.1); promoting a positive image of themselves in classroom discussions (5.2.2); seeking intimacy in friendships (5.3.1); and valuing sincerity in interpersonal relationships (5.3.2). The aim of these two chapters is to shed light on the participants' important intercultural adjustment concerns as revealed by their constructions of emotions in their intercultural encounters, as well as to identify the relevant personal and contextual factors that influence the development of these adjustment concerns. Chapters 6 and 7 examine the participants' various ways of responding to emotions in their intercultural adjustment processes, which indicate the adjustment strategies the participants resort to when managing emotions in intercultural encounters. These strategies can be identified as three types: changing oneself, changing the environment, and other responses. Specifically, these strategies are: encountering the new environment: promoting open-mindedness and developing self-monitoring skills (6.2.1);

confronting the adjustment challenges: guiding thoughts in a more desirable direction (6.2.2); having confidence in intercultural encounters (6.2.3); managing the perceived importance of the events or situations in intercultural communication (6.2.4); actions towards 'good' events or situations (7.2.1); actions towards 'bad' events or situations (7.2.2); emotional-focused coping (7.3.1); and avoiding emotion eliciting events or situations (7.3.2). Similarly to Chapters 4 and 5, these two chapters also investigate the relevant personal and contextual factors and their effects on the development processes of the participants' affective adjustment strategies, with a view to demonstrating the dynamics of the participants' adjustment concerns and strategies.

Chapter 8 is the concluding chapter, in which the main findings are summarized and discussed in a broader context (8.2). I will then discuss how the main findings contribute to the existing understanding of the affective aspect of intercultural adjustment and intercultural competence, the focus and facets of the intercultural adjustment process, and the issue of adopting an appropriate theoretical framework through which to study intercultural adjustment phenomena (8.3). Methodological (8.4) and social (8.5) implications are then outlined. The limitations of the study (8.6) and directions for future research (8.7) are also suggested.

## **Chapter 2 Literature review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

As stated in the introduction chapter, this study explores the emotional experiences of a group of Chinese students in a UK university while they adjust to the host academic and sociocultural environment. In order to address this research aim, I first discuss what intercultural adjustment refers to in this study, the perspective I adopt when investigating intercultural adjustment phenomena, and the significance of studying emotion in intercultural adjustment, all with a view to providing a rationale for this study and specifying my research approach (2.2). I then revisit the current understanding in the existing literature of the affective aspect of Chinese international students' intercultural adjustment experiences, in order to identify what has already been examined, what is under-explored, and what remains unconsidered. Specifically, I will review and discuss relevant concepts and theories of emotion in interpersonal communication (2.3.1), intercultural adjustment processes (2.3.2), the affective aspect of intercultural communication and affective intercultural competence (2.3.3), and Chinese affective communication (2.3.4), as well as empirical research on sojourners' studying abroad and intercultural relationship experiences (2.3.5). Informed by this review of previous studies, I then draw conclusions of what still needs to be done and then formulate the three research questions that this study aims to address (2.4).

### **2.2 Conceptualizing intercultural adjustment and the significance of studying emotion in intercultural adjustment**

The phenomena of intercultural adjustment have been widely discussed in the existing literature (for example, Oberg, 1960; Furnham and Bochner, 1982;

Hammer et al., 1978; Ward et al., 2001). In this thesis, I will draw on Kim's (2005) interactive and integrative perspective of investigating intercultural adjustment phenomena. Kim defined intercultural adjustment as 'the entirety of the phenomenon of individuals who, upon relocating to an unfamiliar sociocultural environment, strive to establish and maintain a relatively stable, reciprocal, and functional relationship with the environment' (Kim, 2005, p. 380). This definition views intercultural adjustment as a process which takes place between individuals and their environment. As such, instead of viewing intercultural adjustment as static and stable entities that are prevalent in the existing studies (Kim, 2005), this definition highlights a dynamic and multidimensional perspective on intercultural adjustment and therefore has the potential to improve the prevalent understanding of intercultural adjustment phenomena.

The essential goal of intercultural adjustment is to achieve an overall 'fit' between the individuals and the environment to which they attempt to adjust (Anderson, 1994; Kim, 2005), a process undertaken by individuals responding to the demands of the environment (Anderson, 1994). It is individuals' perceptions of the demands of the environment that motivates their adjustment behaviour, as 'situations only have psychological significance to the individual as he or she appraises them' (Anderson, 1994, p. 303). Therefore, intercultural adjustment is 'a motive, goal-directed movement' (Anderson, 1994, p. 304) in which individual sojourners' perceptions of their intercultural events play an essential role, as it specifies sojourners' motives without which their adjustment attempts would not occur. Moreover, individuals' own needs and interests, as well as the reasons for their sojourn, may also play a role in their adjustment processes and outcomes (Kim, 2005; Ward et al., 2001), as they may 'be more ready or willing to embrace those host cultural elements that serve his or her own needs' (Kim, 2005, p. 382); this indicates the selectivity of their adjustment (Anderson, 1994; Kim, 2005; Ward et al., 2001). In other words, paying attention to sojourners' motives, needs, self-interest, and commitments may provide insightful answers

to the question: “Why does adjustment “work” in some cases and not in others?” (Anderson, 1994, p. 300).

Such a view focuses my research attention on studying the emotions involved in individual sojourners’ intercultural adjustment processes. This is because ‘emotion is generated by events that are important for our well-being or that relate to our concerns’ (Planalp, 1999, p. 19), including motives, goals, and interests, thereby providing crucial information regarding the individual sojourners’ agenda that drive their adjustment actions. Moreover, emotions prepare the mind and body to respond to the events or situations that trigger the emotions (Planalp, 1999) and affect many ‘performance-relevant outcomes including judgments, attitudinal responses, creativity, helping behaviour, and risk taking’ (Brief and Weiss, 2002, p. 293). Studying emotions therefore also inform sojourners’ action tendencies in their adjustment processes. In other words, investigating sojourners’ understanding of emotions sheds light on the question of ‘what must be adjusted to and how adjustment should proceed’ (Anderson, 1994, p. 303) from their own perspectives, which has the potential to improve the current understanding of the reasons and processes of intercultural adjustment phenomena.

In the following sections, I will therefore firstly outline the relevant theories of communicating emotion in interpersonal communication contexts in order to reveal what emotional communication is about as well as its significance in social life and decisions (2.3.1). I will then review the relevant theories of intercultural adjustment processes (2.3.2), the affective aspect of intercultural communication (2.3.3) and Chinese affective communication (2.3.4), as well as empirical research on international students’ studying abroad experiences and intercultural friendship development (2.3.5). By reviewing these areas, I will highlight the areas that are under-explored or missing in the current understanding of the affective aspect of Chinese international students’ intercultural adjustment experiences in the existing literature (2.4) and will formulate the research questions I am going to address in this study.

## **2.3 A review of the relevant concepts, theories, and research**

As outlined above, in this section I review and discuss the relevant concepts, theories, and research related to my study focus. I begin my review by discussing the concept of emotion, the forms, functions, and characteristics of emotional communication, and the significance of emotion and emotional communication in social life and decisions.

### **2.3.1 Concepts and theories of emotions in interpersonal communication**

Emotions are defined by Oatley and Jenkins (1996, p.124) as “the guiding structures of our lives – especially of our relations with others”. There are two essential components to understanding emotions: appraisal and action tendencies. During the appraisal processes, individuals attach emotional meaning to events, such as judging an event as good or bad; yet, on the other hand, emotions also inform individuals’ decisions to act or not act, thereby revealing their actions tendencies in interpersonal communication (Planalp, 1999). As such, emotions help a person to prepare for the evaluation of the situations around him/her and to take action in order to pursue his/her goals or enhance well-being (Lazarus, 1991).

Although emotions and emotional communication are personal, as they involve a privacy concern, they also have a social side. To begin with, there are various forms of emotional connection that operate among people during interactions. For example, people may react to the same event or situation with similar emotions, which is termed ‘emotional coincidence’ (Planalp, 1999). Individuals also ‘tend to mimic the facial expressions, vocal expressions, postures, and instrumental behaviors of people around them, and thereby to “catch” others’ emotions as a consequence of such facial, vocal, and postural

feedback' (Hatfield et al., 1993, p. 96), a phenomenon called 'emotional contagion'. Moreover, people may feel others' emotions by imagining and understanding the situations that trigger the emotions; such a form of emotional connection is known as empathy (Planalp, 1999). Moreover, emotion signals the depth of interpersonal relationships. For instance, social penetration theory proposes that the development process of interpersonal relationships progresses 'from a casual/superficial level to a personal/intimate level' (Altman and Taylor, 1973, cited in Chen and Starosta, 2005, p. 121). In this way, intimacy reflects closeness in interpersonal relationships. Social penetration theory further argues that what individuals choose to disclose to others influences the intimacy in their interpersonal relationships. That is, intimacy in an interpersonal relationship is gradually enhanced as the breadth and depth of individuals' self-disclosure increases (Altman and Taylor, 1973, cited in Chen and Starosta, 2005). As such, the development of emotions in interpersonal relationships is closely related to social interactions. Furthermore, emotion and emotional communication themselves are socially defined and shaped. That is, emotions, emotional meaning, as well as ways to communicate and manage emotions are socialized according to individuals' power positions and status within a society (Planalp, 1999).

More precisely, emotions and emotional communication are both personal and social, as 'social roles guide our emotional communication, and at the same time emotional communication shapes our social roles' (Planalp, 1999, p. 146). The relationship between individuals' ways of communicating emotions and the methods expected by society is therefore reciprocal (Planalp, 1999). Such a characteristic of emotional communication enables individuals to simultaneously pursue their personal goals and to enact in their social roles during their emotional communication processes. For instance, by communicating anger in the face of injustice, people aim to preserve social justice (Planalp, 1999) by defending their personal welfare. In other words, emotions and emotional communication are interconnected with both personal

and social considerations, and are used to pursue people's concerns which are simultaneously personal and social.

It is clear that emotion management is built into the very substance of the emotional communication process, since people use emotional communication to strategically pursue their own goals (Planalp, 1999). Emotion management is defined as 'a process in which an individual tries to alter, put down or reveal his/her or others' emotions and expressions' (Given, 2008, p. 250). Generally speaking, there are two common strategies of managing emotions: managing emotion eliciting events and managing appraisals, which respectively 'deal with the eliciting event or situation that produces the emotion' and 'change how we think about or appraise emotion eliciting events' (Planalp, 1999, p. 76-77). In the former case, people may adopt various techniques to manage emotion eliciting events. These techniques may not, however, always be appropriate or effective. For example, Planalp (1999) argues that the technique of seeking emotional support from others would not necessarily enhance people's emotional well-being, as it may bring about emotional burdens that are too great for others to bear, or 'violate a social norm against inappropriate emotional self-disclosure' (Planalp, 1999, p. 117). The strategy of managing appraisals, on the other hand, involves a transformation of the belief systems upon which emotions are based (Planalp, 1999). A relevant technique in this regard is reappraisal, which means to reformulate initial interpretations of threat and the corresponding withdrawal tendencies into interpretations of promise and potential success with corresponding approach tendencies. (Metts and Planalp, 2011). This may not be an easy task, however, as one may lack the motivation to change his/her deeply familiar ways of dealing with the world, 'even if they are not always pleasant or effective' (Planalp, 1999, p. 86).

To sum up, emotions inform individuals' judgement of and actions towards events or situations. There are various forms of emotional connection in interpersonal communication. They serve the function of strategically pursuing individuals' goals which are both personal and social. As such, emotional



communication processes are embedded in emotion management. There are two common ways of managing emotions: managing emotion-eliciting events or situations; and managing appraisals. Emotion management can be a challenging task because, on the one hand, techniques focused on managing emotions may not be effective or appropriate in certain situations; while on the other hand, people may cling to their original methods of connecting with the world and thus lack the motivation to manage their emotions.

As such, emotions and emotional communication play important roles in social life and decisions, as they orient individuals towards the things that matter to them, as well as equipping them with the capacity to make informed decisions and take actions to strategically pursue such things in their social life. Bearing such an understanding of emotions and emotional communication in mind, in the following subsections I will review the relevant theories and research in the existing intercultural literature, in order to see what has been done and what still needs to be done regarding emotions and emotional communication in intercultural adjustment contexts, thereby pinpointing the focus of inquiry in this study.

### **2.3.2 Theories of intercultural adjustment processes**

A number of researchers have developed theories in order to depict and explain intercultural adjustment phenomena. Some focus on depicting sojourners' stress experiences and psychological adjustments in their intercultural encounters (for example, Oberg, 1960), while others see intercultural adjustment as a learning process with the aim of acquiring relevant sociocultural skills towards gaining effective functions in the host environment (for example, Furnham and Bochner, 1982; Guthrie, 1975; and Lee, 1979). As proposed by Ward and Kennedy (1992), however, intercultural adjustment involves both psychological and sociocultural processes and therefore a more comprehensive perspective is essential in order to soundly understand the effects of emotions on sojourners' overall intercultural adjustment experiences.

As a result, in this subsection I will review three influential theoretical models or frameworks which incorporate the psychological and sociocultural dimensions of intercultural adjustment, in order to illustrate how intercultural adjustment processes are theorized and what attentions have been paid to emotions and emotional communication during the adjustment processes depicted in these models, as well as to discuss the limitations of these models.

#### Kim's (2005) 'stress-adaptation-growth' model

Kim (2005) proposes an intercultural adjustment model based on an interactive and integrative perspective, which views communication as the essential vehicle for adjustment as it links individuals with their environments. It is during sojourners' communication processes that their cognitive, affective, and behavioural adjustments evolve. The adjustment process is depicted as an upward and forward 'stress-adaptation-growth' cyclical process. During this process, the sojourners first experience stress when they encounter the new sociocultural environment which triggers their initial 'draw back' responses, along with their emotional 'lows' such as anxiety, uncertainty, and confusion. Such stress-inducing experiences indicate sojourners' inadequate ways of dealing with the demands of the host environment due to their lack of understanding of the host communication system; these stressful scenarios thus urge them to learn about the new system. After their initial stressful experiences, sojourners' adaptive energy is activated with the aim to reorganize them towards a leap forward in their adjustment progress. This reorganizing process involves both the acquisition of new cultural elements and unlearning one's previously acquired cultural elements, which leads to a 'loss' of some of their previous habits in the long term. The outcomes of sojourners' adjustment process therefore include 'increased chances of success in meeting the demands of the host environment', as well as assimilation into the host sociocultural system. In other words, they reach 'a state of the maximum

possible convergence of strangers' internal and external conditions to those of the native' (Kim, 2005, p. 383).

Kim (2005) also identifies a variety of issues that affect sojourners' adjustment processes. The first is sojourners' communication with local people. She argues that host social communication provides essential informational support and develops sojourners' understanding of local people's ways of thinking and behaving, thereby securing sojourners' 'points of reference for a check and validation of their own behaviours' (Kim, 2005, p. 386). The second issue is sojourners' communication with their co-nationals, which is significant in terms of securing emotional, informational, and material support which compensates for sojourners' initial lack of host support or inability to be self-reliant in the host environment. Kim (2005) also highlights the drawbacks of over-relying on co-national support, however, as it has a limiting effect on sojourners' full participation in the host communication activities. Moreover, Kim (2005m p. 387) believes that host receptivity, which refers to 'the degree to which a given environment is structurally and psychologically accessible and open to strangers', also influences the extent of sojourners' participation in the host society.

Moreover, Kim (2005) discusses the outcome of intercultural adjustment processes in terms of intercultural identity development. The first aspect of this development is an increasingly individualized self-other orientation that 'see[s] oneself and others on the basis of unique individual qualities' rather than 'being restricted by categories of social grouping' (Kim, 2005, p. 392). Such a position therefore promotes an enhanced self-awareness based on an understanding of individuals' unique characteristics rather than stereotypical images. Another element closely related to the individualized self-other orientation is 'universalization', which refers to the ability 'to see the oneness and unity of humanity and locate the points of consent and complementarity beyond the points of difference and contention' (Kim, 2005, p. 392). In this way, people would be able to overcome their 'exclusive [cultural] parochial viewpoint' in

favour of a more inclusive point of view that integrates, rather than separates, diverse perspectives evolved during intercultural communication processes (Kim, 2005, p. 392). The development process of intercultural identity therefore involves a more sophisticated grasp of individual uniqueness with the aim of breaking down stereotypical impressions on the one hand, and of seeing similarities beyond the apparent differences moving towards a more inclusive intercultural perspective on the other.

The problem with Kim's (2005) model mainly lies in its restrictiveness in terms of soundly understanding the intricacies of sojourners' adjustment processes and experiences in several ways. To begin with, when depicting the intercultural adjustment process, Kim's model focuses exclusively on cultural learning, but neglects other potentially essential elements. For example, Anderson (1994) proposes that in addition to cultural learning, intercultural adjustment also involves emotion management processes such as accepting other cultures' customs and dealing with 'feelings of loss, bereavement, faltering identity, or of values and beliefs besieged' (Anderson, 1994, p. 304). In Kim's (2005) model, however, the process of adjustment is reduced to a cultural learning process and she seems to assume that cultural learning would automatically lead to affective changes such as value transformation and enhanced psychological well-being. Such an assumption is doubtful as emotion management is a very complex process and factors such as lacking motivation may interfere with managing affective responses effectively (Planalp, 1999).

Moreover, this model assumes that sojourners' stress experiences automatically lead to their adjustment efforts and personal growth, thereby viewing adjustment as a predictable, linear process. As such, Kim neglects the significance of human agency (e.g., values, expectations, and so on) in the adjustment process and is therefore restrictive in understanding the role that the individual sojourner plays in their own personal adjustment process.

Furthermore, the model considers assimilation (i.e., converging one's conditions with those of the host by 'losing' one's original habits) as a natural

and desirable outcome of the adjustment process, which in fact 'limits options for the maintenance of cultural identity in sojourners' (Ward et al., 2001, p. 117). According to Ward et al. (2001, p. 120), in real-life contexts sojourners may prefer to 'have strong preferences for retaining their cultural identities while sustaining good relationships with members of the dominant culture', which is a more integrationist (rather than assimilative) adjustment strategy. In addition, by assuming an assimilation adjustment outcome, this model also takes an essentialist and ethnocentrically biased position (Ward et al., 2001), which presupposes differences between sojourners' conditions and those of the host people and sees sojourners' loss of their original attributes as inevitable. Thus, this model is also restrictive in terms of grasping the diversity of sojourners' adjustment orientations and outcomes.

To sum up, Kim's (2005) model is reductionist and one dimensional in nature and therefore may be unable to holistically capture the uniqueness and complexity of individual sojourners' intercultural adjustment experiences in real-life contexts.

#### Ward et al.'s (2001) ABC framework

Ward and her colleagues (2001) have composed an 'ABC framework' for the study of intercultural adjustment processes. 'ABC' refers to the three major theoretical approaches: the affective approach; the behavioural approach; and the cognitive approach. Specifically, the affective approach focuses on the psychological adjustment process, which is captured by a stress and coping framework. This framework aims at dealing with sojourners' affective responses towards well-being or intercultural transitional satisfaction. Factors such as social support, personality, and lifestyle changes play essential roles in such an adjustment process (Ward and Kennedy, 1992). The behavioural approach centres on a cultural learning process which involves grasping the intricacies of intercultural communication processes geared towards acquiring satisfying and effective intercultural experiences. Sojourners' capability to communicate

effectively or to 'fit in' in the host environment is enhanced during such a learning process. The cognitive approach deals with the issues of how people identify themselves and others culturally and ethnically, as well as the ways they build relations with their in-groups (i.e., their own ethnic groups) and out-groups (i.e., other ethnic groups) in intercultural communication.

Although the ABC framework sheds light on a relatively comprehensive perspective of the intercultural adjustment phenomena by specifying the affective, behavioural, and cognitive aspects of the adjustment process, it narrows the focus of affective intercultural adjustment into preserving psychological well-being and satisfaction. As such, the framework fails to examine the effects of understanding and managing emotions on sojourners' overall adjustment experiences. Therefore, this framework seems inadequate to yield a holistic insight into the roles emotions and emotional communication play in sojourners' intercultural adjustment processes.

#### Anderson's (1994) intercultural adjustment model

Anderson (1994) proposes an intercultural adjustment model from a social psychological perspective. She argues that it is individual sojourners' own appraisals and perceptions of intercultural events or situations that 'determine both what must be adjusted to and how adjustment should proceed' (Anderson, 1994, p. 303), which in turn leads to various forms and levels of adjustment that differ from individual to individual.

In this model, intercultural adjustment is depicted as a recursive and cyclical process that consists of four dimensions: cultural encounter, obstacles, response generation, and overcoming. The 'cultural encounter' dimension refers to the initial moments in which sojourners encounter intercultural events or situations in the host environment. The 'obstacle' refers to sojourners' constructions of the demands of the host environment in the form of psychological dissatisfiers or stressors. The obstacles reveal sojourners' internal imbalance or tensions which 'make demands that tax or exceed the adjustive

resources of the individual' (Anderson, 1994, p. 302) and therefore lead to the generation of sojourners' adjustment responses, depicted as the third dimension of the model. The 'overcoming' dimension is the moment when sojourners experience a 'relatively steady progression toward harmony with the new environment' (Anderson, 1994, p.308). The entire adjustment process involves various affective and cognitive processes which jointly guide sojourners' adjustment actions.

The model also elaborates sojourners' four common means of responding to the demands of the host environment: 'by changing the environment, by changing oneself, by doing nothing at all, or by walking away' (Anderson, 1994, p. 305). Among these four strategies, the options of changing the environment with a view to neutralizing the demands and of changing the sojourner themselves, so that certain demands are no longer demands (such as setting priorities, lowering expectations towards sojourners' own or others' behaviour, and changing personal values and beliefs to attain harmony with those of the host culture), are the only two adaptive instrumental options sojourners can resort to in order to enter the 'overcoming' moments specified in the model. In a real-life context, however, there may be situations in which these two instrumental options are not available and sojourners need to remain in place. In such cases, sojourners may have to compromise in certain situations by adopting an 'emotion-focused coping' strategy (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984), which 'leaves the obstacle objectively untouched and targets only its emotional, motor-behavioral, or psychological effects' such as 'trying to make the best of the situation as it is' (Anderson, 1994, p. 313), so that they avoid being overwhelmed by the obstacles.

In addition, Anderson (1994) believes that sojourners' adjustment responses are influenced by a variety of personal factors, such as their current emotional state, beliefs, motivations, and commitments. She also emphasizes the importance of expanding social interactions in order to secure a supportive environment, which can strongly boost sojourners' motivation to remain

open-minded and to deal with obstacles by drawing on adaptive instrumental strategies in their adjustment processes.

This model is particularly useful for my study in several ways. To begin with, it 'allows for contributions from the individual's thought processes' (Anderson, 1994, p. 302) by highlighting the significance of individuals' on-going meaning-making processes in orienting their adjustment options and thereby creating their own unique adjustment experiences. Instead of viewing intercultural adjustment as a linear process in which sojourners simply assimilate themselves to the demands of the host environment, this model in fact emphasizes the active role sojourners play in the adjustment process, which in turn leads to the various forms and levels of adjustment. Moreover, this model acknowledges that both personal and contextual factors can influence the adjustment processes, thus gesturing to the interactive characteristics of intercultural adjustment. Furthermore, by focusing on individual sojourners' perceptions and appraisals of events and relating them to the generation of their adjustment responses, this model also integrates the affective, cognitive, and behavioural dimensions of intercultural adjustment processes and highlights the connections between each other. As such, it overcomes the drawbacks of many other models that treat these three aspects as isolated processes that are not influenced by one another, and restrict the affective aspect of adjustment to a process that restores individuals' inner mental health yet ignores its significance in setting sojourners' own agenda or guiding their adjustment choices. In other words, this model takes a more holistic view and has the potential to reveal how individual sojourners' understanding of their emotions may influence or inform their overall adjustment experiences.

In conclusion, by emphasizing the significance of individuals' appraisals and perceptions of events in shaping their adjustment experiences, Anderson's (1994) model overcomes the drawbacks of many other models and frameworks that are more one-dimensional, reductionist, or restrictive in their perspective.



It is a powerful tool in understanding the uniqueness, intricacies, and dynamics of sojourners' intercultural adjustment processes and is therefore a good fit with my study. I will draw on this model as a starting point for the analysis and interpretation of the data of this study on the participants' understanding of and responses to emotions in their adjustment processes.

Having reviewed the relevant concepts and theories of emotions in interpersonal communication and intercultural adjustment processes, I will now discuss the concepts and theories related to the affective aspect of intercultural communication and affective intercultural competence that have been proposed in the existing literature and establish their relevance to this study.

### **2.3.3 Concepts and theories of the affective aspect of intercultural communication and affective intercultural competence**

In comparison to the large number of works on the cognitive and behavioural aspects of intercultural communication, discussions of the affective aspect of intercultural communication and affective intercultural competence are relatively under-developed (Spitzberg and Changnon, 2009). In this subsection, I will first review the relevant concepts that depict the affective processes in intercultural communication, including individuals' emotional responses and related emotion eliciting events, action tendencies, emotional needs, and situational factors that may have effects on their emotions. I will then move on to discuss the relevant concepts and models regarding the affective aspect of intercultural competence.

In regard to the emotional responses sojourners may have when entering a new environment, Chen and Starosta (2005) propose a list of concepts that presents a variety of feelings, as well as the relevant events that trigger these feelings:

“(1) a feeling of strain that comes from our attempts at psychological adjustment; (2) a feeling of loss regarding friends and family, social status, and possessions; (3) a feeling of being rejected by or rejecting the host nationals; (4) a feeling of confusion in beliefs, values, and role expectations; (5) a generalized feeling of anxiety, disgust, or surprise in

the face of cultural differences; and (6) a feeling of impotence for being unable to cope with aspects of, or tasks in, the new environment.” (Chen and Starosta, 2005, p. 165-166)

Neuliep and McCroskey (1997) have also introduced an affective concept that captures a kind of emotional response one may experience in intercultural communication: intercultural communication apprehension, which refers to ‘the fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with people from different groups, especially cultural and/or ethnic groups’ (Neuliep and McCroskey, 1997, p. 148). Intercultural communication apprehension has its own action tendency implications, as people who experience a high degree of intercultural communication apprehension tend to avoid intercultural interactions (Neuliep, 2012). These concepts provide some insight into sojourners’ potential emotional responses and their action tendencies which are related to encountering a new environment or engaging in intercultural communication. Yet, these theories exclusively focus on negative emotions and the resultant hampering effect on individuals’ performance associated with intercultural encounter. In this way, such concepts may only depict a partial picture of sojourners’ affective intercultural experiences. This issue will be investigated in the present study.

Some other authors pay close attention to the role of ingroup members in sojourners’ affective intercultural experiences. For example, in their study of the factors that affect the formation of mixed groups for the completion of academic tasks, Volet and Ang (1998) highlight the significance of students’ desire for cultural-emotional connectedness in reinforcing their preference to work with their co-nationals. Cultural-emotional connectedness is defined as ‘perceptions of feeling more comfortable, thinking along the same wavelength, and sharing a similar communication style and sense of humour when interacting with peers from the same cultural background’ (Volet and Ang, 1998, p. 10). As such, the need to preserve cultural-emotional connectedness may prevent sojourners’ full engagement with the host environment. On the other hand, Gudykunst (2005) argues that the presence of one’s own ingroup

members would in fact decrease the participant's anxiety during intercultural communication, thereby indicating the value of ingroup members in easing negative emotional responses in intercultural contexts. These perspectives shed light on the complex effects that ingroup members have on sojourners' affective intercultural adjustment processes, an influence which will be further explored in the current research.

Moreover, there are some discussions in the existing literature that consider the affect aspect of intercultural competence. Competence is highly relevant to cultural adjustment, as Anderson (1994, p. 322) argues that 'the development of competence in response to challenges' is what cultural adjustment is all about. In intercultural contexts, competence is defined as 'the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioural orientations to the world' (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009, p. 7). Such a definition grasps the outline of the meaning of intercultural competence, but is not specific enough to capture the intricacies of the affective aspect of intercultural competence. Chen and Starosta (1996), however, conceptualize affective intercultural competence as the ability to project and receive positive emotional messages in intercultural communication processes.

Some researchers have presented more specific concepts to depict components of affective intercultural competence. For example, Deardorff (2006) proposes that respect in terms of valuing all cultures is fundamental to intercultural competence development. Byram (1997, p. 50) also argues that one's full engagement with the host environment is underpinned by his/her curiosity and open attitude, which refers to a 'willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equality' as well as 'readiness to experience the different stages of adaptation to and interaction with another culture during a period of residence'. The development of such affective competence is based on an 'ethnorelative' worldview raised in Bennett's (2004) work, which emphasizes the act of valuing the importance of

various realities in addition to one's own, while discouraging the ethnocentric viewpoint of treating one's own reality as 'the only basis for perceiving events' (Bennett, 2004, p. 73).

While the above concepts capture the significance of attitudinal adjustments and value transformation in developing affective intercultural competence, they do not provide a detailed picture of the processes of affective competence development or the issues that emerge during such processes. In this regard, Chen and Starosta (1997; 2000) propose an intercultural sensitivity model that explores individuals' development of positive emotions towards intercultural interactions. Six components of this developing process are identified: self-esteem, self-monitoring, open-mindedness, empathy, interaction involvement, and suspending judgement. Self-esteem refers to 'a sense of self-value or self-worth' (Chen and Starosta, 1997, p. 6) and to an individual's ability to be confident and express an optimistic outlook in intercultural communication (Chen and Starosta, 1997). Self-monitoring involves managing one's behaviour according to the specific characteristics of a situation in order to ensure the appropriateness of one's behaviour, as well as presenting oneself competently in interpersonal interactions (Chen and Starosta, 1997; 2000). Being open-minded requires a willingness to engage in open and appropriate self-explanations and to accept explanations from others, as well as to be willing 'to recognize, accept, and appreciate different views and ideas' (Chen and Starosta, 1997, p. 7). Empathy is the capacity to step into others' shoes in order to access to others' views and experience others' feelings (Chen and Starosta, 1997, 2000). Interaction involvement refers to the ability to initiate and terminate intercultural interactions in a fluent and appropriate manner (Chen and Starosta, 2000), which 'emphasizes a person's sensitivity ability in interaction' (Chen and Starosta, 1997, p. 8). Suspending judgement requires avoiding jumping to conclusions based on one's present knowledge and/or attitudes towards others when engaging in intercultural interactions; it also involves promoting enjoyable feelings towards cultural diversities (Chen and

Starosta, 2000). Suspending judgement is often realized in terms of listening to others in a sincere manner within interactional processes, and it often leads to communication satisfaction and happiness on the other side of the interaction (Chen and Starosta, 1997). Overall, Chen and Starosta's (1997; 2000) model adopts a holistic perspective on the development of affective intercultural competence, as it captures the affective processes related to a variety of issues, including personal management (i.e., enhancing self-esteem and promoting self-monitoring skills), value transformation (i.e., open-mindedness, empathy, suspending judgment), and interaction management (i.e., interaction involvement). As such, it may be a useful starting point to analyse and interpret the intricacies of individual sojourners' affective intercultural adjustment processes towards competence.

In the present study, I will examine whether the participants develop the above components of affective intercultural competence during their intercultural adjustment processes and their implications.

Given the focus of this study in terms of investigating a group of Chinese students' affective intercultural communication and adjustment experiences, I will now move on to review the relevant concepts and theories of Chinese affective communication in order to explore their strengths, limitations, and relevance to this study.

#### **2.3.4 Concepts and theories of Chinese affective communication**

A number of researchers have discussed affective communication issues in Chinese culture, including value orientations towards self-presentation, self-disclosure, establishing and developing interpersonal emotional connections, and managing interpersonal conflicts.

Some authors (e.g., Gao, Ting-Toomey, and Gudykunst) have explored the concept of *Mianzi* (面子; face) and its implications on self-presentation or self-disclosure in Chinese communication. *Mianzi* refers to 'an individual's claimed sense of positive image in a relational and network context'

(Ting-Toomey, 1985, 1988, cited in Gao and Ting-Toomey, 1998, p. 53), which guides individuals' self-presentation in Chinese communication. Moreover, Gao et al. (1996) argue that the concern of preserving face may make Chinese people feel reluctant to be involved in self-disclosure, and most Chinese would only disclose face-threatening information to those they already trust.

In the domain of interpersonal relationship development, two emotion-relevant concepts are worthy of attention in Chinese communication literature: the concepts of *gan qing* (感情; feeling) and *yuan* (缘). The concept of *gan qing* (感情; feeling) emphasizes the close connections between emotions and behaviour in Chinese communication, as *gan qing* is achieved by mutually caring and helpful behaviour rather than by direct and explicit expressions (Gao and Ting-Toomey, 1998). The concept of *yuan* (缘), on the other hand, refers to 'the condition that allows results to come to fruition' (Fang, 1990, p. 153, cited in Chang, 2002). Originally derived from Buddhism, it emphasizes the importance of the interplay between multiple causes that produce events and the view that the disintegration of these causes may lead to an end of *yuan*, as well as a decreased relational depth in interpersonal relationships. In such situations, one has to let things go despite reluctance (Chang, 2002). As such, the concept of *yuan* informs the prevalent value orientation towards interpersonal relationship development in Chinese culture: since nothing is permanent in the world, one needs to cherish and make the most of relationships with others when the 'right' opportunity arises; yet, one also needs to respect uncontrollable life changes (Chang, 2002) and to refrain from taking futile action against such alterations.

When it comes to dealing with interpersonal conflicts, Bond (1991) argues that the importance of maintaining harmonious interpersonal relationships in Chinese culture makes most people believe that any form of conflict will lead to chaos in society and should therefore be avoided entirely. As a result, when trying to resolve conflict in interpersonal communication, Chinese people are

more likely to use strategies such as introducing a third party (Chen, 2002; Chuang and Hale, 2002), as well as through obliging, avoiding, integrating, and non-confrontation tactics (Chen, 2002), rather than resorting to strategies such as negotiation or confrontation.

The above concepts and theories provide some insights into Chinese affective communication behaviour. Their limitations, however, are also apparent, as these concepts and theories are focused on making general claims and predicting Chinese people's behavioural preferences. Such a position may be inadequate or even misleading in grasping the nuances and complexities of individual Chinese students' affective communication behaviour in daily intercultural contexts, as individual sojourners' adjustment behaviours are difficult to predict and may be influenced by 'a host of individual, cultural and external factors' (Brown, 2008, p. 2). In this study I will therefore examine the relevance of these concepts and theories in soundly capturing the intricacies of the participants' affective intercultural adjustment experiences.

Having discussed the current understanding of Chinese affective communication in the existing literature, in the next subsection I will review some empirical research on sojourners' studying abroad and intercultural relationship experiences that are relevant to the focus of this study.

### **2.3.5 Empirical research on sojourners' studying abroad and intercultural relationship experiences**

Pertaining to student sojourners' studying abroad experiences, Robertson et al. (2000) surveyed international students' perceptions of academic staff in an Australian study. The findings highlight international students' desire to 'fit in' with the new academic environment and be accepted by the staff, while also indicating a lack of empathy from many of the staff members. The study calls for joint efforts towards effective staff-student communication and mutually satisfied learning outcomes. As such, this study demonstrates the significance of studying emotional communication in unravelling the deep concerns international students have regarding their academic adjustment and in raising

issues to be improved in the host academic environment. The study in question, however, was conducted in an Australian university and the participants were undergraduate students from different countries. Thus, the findings of this study may not necessarily transfer to Chinese taught Masters students studying in a UK university context.

Turner (2006) conducted a study of Chinese one-year taught Masters students' studying experiences in a UK business school. The findings suggest that the participants' adjustment to the host academic environment had an instrumental focus as securing their Masters degree was highly valued. This study does not provide a picture of the participants' social intercultural experiences, however, as its focus is located exclusively within the academic adjustment domain.

Meanwhile, Spencer-Oatey and Xiong's (2006) study explores Chinese students' sociocultural and psychological adjustment experiences in the UK based on Ward et al.'s (2001) model. The findings indicate that there was a lack of social interaction between Chinese students and host people due to a perceived lack of things in common or clash of values. In addition, many participants commented on the disadvantages of a large proportion of Chinese students that dampened their experience of studying abroad. These findings provide some interesting insights into Chinese students' perspectives on communication with the host people and the effects of a large Chinese group in the UK university context. The interviews in this study, however, were aimed at further investigating the issues raised in the close-ended questionnaire survey conducted beforehand. Thus, the interviewing data in this study may not necessarily capture the complexity of individual Chinese students' feelings of and perspectives on their host encounters and Chinese co-nationals, or the implications of these feelings and perspectives for students' adjustment orientations.

In terms of the research focuses, setting, and methodology, Brown's (2008) work shares the most similarities with the present study. She undertook an



ethnographic study (which involves in-depth individual interviews and participant observation) to explore a group of international postgraduate students' intercultural adjustment experiences in a UK university, and identified a variety of research categories that captured these students' academic and sociocultural adjustment journey. Some interesting affective adjustment issues emerge among these categories. For example, some participants were concerned about the negative evaluation or alienation from their ingroup members if they joined host groups, which in turn placed pressure on them to conform to their ingroup network at the expense of expanding their host network, thus suggests the restrictive effects of ingroup conformity pressure on sojourners' attempts to develop host connections. As the participants in Brown's (2008) study were international students from different nationalities, it is unclear as to whether the affective adjustment issues raised in this study are relevant to Chinese international students, a point that will be explored in the present study.

In regard to sojourners' intercultural relationship experiences, Kudo and Simkin (2003) investigated Japanese international students' perceptions of the formation of their intercultural friendships in an Australian university context. The findings demonstrate that frequent contact, similarity, self-disclosure, and receptivity of other nationals were viewed as four important elements of developing intercultural friendships, providing further insight into international students' perspectives on the facilitating factors of intercultural friendship development. Nonetheless, Kudo and Simkin's work did not focus on exploring students' emotions in their intercultural friendships; it is therefore still unclear as to whether the facilitating factors identified in the study are related to understanding sojourners' emotional experiences in intercultural friendships.

In contrast, Sudweeks et al.'s (1990) study on Japanese female sojourners' intercultural friendship experiences with North American females had an emotional focus, in which a variety of developmental themes that promoted intimacy in intercultural friendships were reported: communication competence,

similarity, involvement, and turning points. The participants in their study, however, were not Chinese international students and the research field was not UK universities; therefore the transferability of the findings of Sudweeks et al.'s study onto Chinese students in the UK is questionable.

In summary, a review of the relevant studies on sojourners' studying abroad and intercultural friendship experiences suggests a lack of empirical research on Chinese sojourners' affective intercultural experiences. In particular, I have been unable to identify any research that specifically focuses on Chinese taught Masters students' emotional experiences of their adjustment to the academic and sociocultural environment in UK university contexts. The present study therefore aims to fill this gap in the existing empirical research.

## **2.4 Conclusions and formulation of research questions**

My review above of the relevant concepts and theories of emotions in interpersonal communication contexts suggests that emotional communication both reflects and shapes social roles. Emotions orientate individuals in relation to things that matter to them, as well as guiding their decision-making processes and actions in order to pursue their concerns in a strategic way. Hence, emotions and emotional communication play crucial roles in people's social lives and decisions. The current understanding of the existing theories and research in intercultural adjustment, intercultural communication, and Chinese affective communication does not adequately capture the significance or intricacies of the affective aspect of Chinese international students' intercultural adjustment experiences. Specifically, the limitations of previous studies are as follows:

First, in previous studies, investigation into the affective aspects of individual sojourners' intercultural adjustment processes is either missing or of a one-dimensional nature. That is, previous studies tend to either neglect the affective process of intercultural adjustment in their focus of inquiry (e.g., Kim,

2005); only centre on the inner aspects of affective adjustment, such as value transformation and the preservation of psychological well-being or satisfaction, without examining the effects of emotions on sojourners' overall adjustment experiences (e.g., Ward et al., 2001); or focus on the dimension of coping with negative intercultural events or adjustment challenges, while neglecting sojourners' responses to positive events and their implications (e.g., Anderson, 1994; Chen and Starosta, 2005; Kim, 2005). In other words, the ways in which individual sojourners understand, communicate, and manage their various emotions during their intercultural adjustment processes are overlooked in the existing literature. As such, previous studies lack exploration into the actual emotional communication process in intercultural adjustment and have therefore failed to capture the complexity or multiple facets of the affective intercultural adjustment process.

Second, the majority of previous studies in intercultural adjustment and Chinese affective communication studies adopt a reductionist perspective. The intercultural adjustment and Chinese affective communication phenomena are often treated as stable and predictable entities (for example, by Bond, 1991; Chen, 2002; Chuang and Hale, 2002; Gao and Ting-Toomey, 1998; and Kim, 2005). As such, many of the previous studies consider the individuals' affective communication and adjustment behaviour without referring to the relevant contexts and depict the adjustment process as one in which sojourners respond to their environments in a mechanical way without any changes. Planalp (1999, p. 135) argues, however, that emotions and emotional communication are social, as many of the emotions people communicate in daily life are 'about and with other people'. The development of a holistic understanding of people's affective communication behaviour should therefore involve an investigation of the effects of the social contexts in which the communication occurs. Moreover, intercultural adjustments in real-life contexts involve 'working toward a fit between person and environment' during which 'environments make demands but also can be used to satisfy individuals' needs' (Anderson, 1994, p. 301). As

such, a sound interpretation of real-life affective intercultural adjustment experiences cannot be given without examining the roles of communicators' agenda or the effects of relevant sociocultural and historical contexts in which the affective communication and adjustment occur.

Having been inspired by the above literature review, and bearing in mind the limitations of previous studies, in this study, I will focus on investigating Chinese students' understanding of and responses to emotions as they adjust to the host environment, with a view to shedding light on the following research objectives:

1. To understand Chinese international students' intercultural adjustment concerns and affective adjustment strategies (as revealed by their understanding of and responses to emotions in their intercultural encounters), as well as the issues that emerge during their affective intercultural adjustment processes;
2. To explore the effects of relevant contextual factors on Chinese students' affective intercultural adjustment experiences, in order to elucidate the (re)construction and (re)negotiation processes of their experiences.

Informed by the above research objectives, I seek to address the following research questions in this study:

RQ1: How do Chinese students in a UK university construct their understanding of emotions in their intercultural adjustment processes in the host environment?

RQ2: How do they respond to emotions in their intercultural adjustment processes in the host environment?

RQ3: What are the relevant sociocultural and historical factors that influence the development processes of these constructions or responses?

The formulation of the first research question is based specifically on my review of the relevant concepts and theories of emotions in interpersonal communication and intercultural adjustment processes and it aims to address

the first research objective. As discussed in 2.3.1, emotional meaning sheds light on the important concerns in an individual's life, including their needs and goals, drives, and interests; it also indicates how individuals are likely to act in the pursuit of these important concerns (Planalp, 1999). Moreover, my review of the relevant theories of intercultural adjustment processes in 2.3.2 highlighted the significance of individuals' appraisals and perceptions of events in shaping their intercultural adjustment experiences (Anderson, 1994). Examining the ways in which Chinese students construct the meaning of their emotions in their intercultural adjustment processes therefore reveals their deepest concerns while adjusting to the host environment, as well as the adjustment actions they are most likely to take. It is with these aspects in mind that the first research question has been formulated.

The second question, which also considers the first research objective, is raised in response to the restrictive focus of inquiry regarding the affective aspect of intercultural adjustment processes as illustrated in my discussion of the existing intercultural adjustment theories in 2.3.2. That is, the majority of previous studies view the affective aspect of intercultural adjustment as a process that restores sojourners' mental health, while ignoring its significance in setting sojourners' agendas or guiding their adjustment choices (e.g., Kim, 2005; Ward et al, 2001). As such, in previous studies there is a lack of insight into how understanding emotions may influence or inform sojourners' overall intercultural adjustment experiences, as well as the intricacies of individual sojourners' adjustment processes and the variety of their adjustment strategies. Studying Chinese students' responses to their emotions in their intercultural adjustment processes would therefore undo the effects of emotion management on their adjustment experiences and the complexity of their adjustment processes. It was in this way that the second research question was formulated.

The formulation of the third research question focused on addressing the limitations involved in a lack of contextual understanding of individuals'

intercultural adjustment processes and Chinese affective communication. As discussed in 2.3.2 and 2.3.4, sojourners' intercultural adjustment processes and Chinese people's affective communication behaviour are largely depicted as static and predictable events that can be investigated outside the contexts in which the adjustment and affective communication occur (e.g., Kim, 2005; Chen, 2002). I have argued, however, that such a position may not be appropriate in the attempt to soundly understand the uniqueness and dynamics of individual sojourners' affective adjustment actions, which may be influenced by a variety of personal and contextual factors. As a result, exploring the effects of relevant sociocultural and historical factors on Chinese students' affective adjustment experiences can provide insights into how their experiences evolve as they interacted with others within specific sociocultural and historical contexts. The third research question was therefore articulated with a view to addressing the second research objective of this study.

## **Chapter summary**

In this chapter, I have provided the theoretical background for the present research. The study aims to understand how Chinese students in a UK university understand and respond to emotions in their intercultural adjustment processes. In order to address this research aim, I first discuss what intercultural adjustment refers to in this study, the perspective I take when investigating intercultural adjustment phenomena, as well as the significance of studying emotion in intercultural adjustment, all with a view to providing a rationale for this study and to specify my research approach.

I then revisit the current understanding of the affective aspect of Chinese international students' intercultural adjustment experiences in the existing literature. Specifically, I start with a review and discussion of the relevant concepts and theories of emotion in interpersonal communication, concluding with the fact that emotion and emotional communication play important roles

in social life and decisions, as they orientate individuals towards things that matter to them and enable them to make informed decisions and take actions geared towards strategically pursuing such things in their social life.

After this, I examine the existing models and framework of intercultural adjustment processes. I review three influential theoretical models or frameworks that incorporate the psychological and sociocultural dimensions of intercultural adjustment. Specifically, Kim's (2005) model is reductionist and one-dimensional in its nature, and is therefore incapable of holistically capturing the uniqueness and complexity of individual sojourners' intercultural adjustment experiences in real-life contexts. Ward et al.'s (2001) ABC framework restricts the focus of affective intercultural adjustment into preserving psychological well-being and satisfaction; it is therefore inadequate in yielding a holistic insight into the roles that emotion and emotional communication play in sojourners' overall intercultural adjustment experiences. Anderson's (1994) intercultural adjustment model, on the other hand, helps to identify the uniqueness, messiness, and dynamics of sojourners' intercultural adjustment processes as it emphasizes the significance of individuals' appraisals and perceptions of events in shaping their adjustment experiences. I therefore draw on this model as a starting point for the analysis and interpretation of the data of this study regarding the participants' understanding of and responses to emotions in their adjustment processes.

In regard to the affective aspect of intercultural communication, the current concepts in the existing intercultural literature are focused exclusively on negative emotions and their hampering effects on individuals' performance associated with intercultural encounters, thereby only providing a partial picture of individual sojourners' affective intercultural experiences. The majority of the concept of affective intercultural competence in the existing literature captures the significance of attitudinal adjustments and value transformation in developing affective intercultural competence, but does not provide a detailed

picture of the processes of affective competence development or issues that emerge during such processes.

As to Chinese affective communication, the current concepts and theories are focused on value orientations towards self-presentation, self-disclosure, establishing and developing interpersonal emotional connections, and managing interpersonal conflicts. These concepts and theories provide some insight into Chinese affective communication behaviour. As they are focused on making general claims and predicting Chinese people's behavioural preferences, however, they may be inadequate or even misleading in grasping the nuances and complexity of individual Chinese students' affective communication behaviour in daily intercultural contexts, which are difficult to predict and can be influenced by many conditional factors.

Finally, I review some empirical research on sojourners' studying abroad and intercultural relationship experiences and discover that there is a lack of empirical research on Chinese sojourners' affective intercultural experiences. In particular, I have been unable to identify any research that specifically focuses on Chinese taught Masters students' emotional experiences during their adjustment to the academic and sociocultural environment in UK universities.

After reviewing the relevant studies, I conclude with the limitations of previous research: first, investigation into the affective aspect of individual sojourners' intercultural adjustment process is either missing or one-dimensional in the previous studies; second, the majority of previous studies in intercultural adjustment and Chinese affective communication studies take a reductionist perspective. I then raise my research objectives and formulate the three research questions that this study aims to address.

Having reviewed the relevant literature and presented the research questions, in the next chapter I turn to the research design and methodological approach adopted in this study.





## **Chapter 3 Research design and methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

As proposed in Chapter two, in this study I investigate the following three research questions:

*RQ1: How do Chinese students in a UK university construct their understandings of emotions in their intercultural adjustment processes in the host environment?*

*RQ2: How do they respond to their emotions in their intercultural adjustment processes in the host environment?*

*RQ3: What are the relevant sociocultural and historical factors that influence the development processes of these constructions or responses?*

In order to address these questions, in this chapter I outline the research design and methodological choices and rationale for this study, present the procedures of data collection and analysis, and discuss issues emerged in the research processes. The chapter starts with a justification of the adoption of a social constructionist paradigm (3.2) and an ethnographic approach as the methodological choice of this study (3.3), followed by descriptions and discussions of the procedures of data collection (3.4) and data analysis (3.5). Important fieldwork issues are then outlined and discussed, including reflexivity (3.6), ethical issues (3.7), and trustworthiness (3.8).

### **3.2 Rationale for a social constructionist paradigm**

This study adopts a social constructionist paradigm because of my understandings about the aims of knowledge and the main research concerns of this study.

As a researcher, I adopt Bhasker's (1989, cited in Brewer, 2000) position that social realities are dynamic and constantly reproduced and transformed under

the influence of humans' daily activities and actions. Accordingly, the aims of knowledge should involve a sense-making element that informs human beings' reactions to the complex and ever-changing social world. I am therefore mainly interested in investigating humans' subjective understanding of the world, as well as how this understanding is co-constructed and negotiated in their daily social practices, which accords with the primary research interest of inquirers in Lincoln et al.'s (2011) loosely-defined constructionist camp.

As established in Chapter One, this study aims to explore how a group of Chinese taught Masters students understand and respond to emotions in their intercultural communication and adjustment processes in a UK university context. According to Anderson (1994, p. 307), intercultural adjustment is a process in which 'possible solutions must be tried out; ineffective responses abandoned; and effective ones adopted, fine-tuned, and retried while new solutions are continuously being tested'. As such, intercultural adjustment is a continuous inquiry process in which sojourners constantly interact with other people and engage with the host environment in order to test and develop their adjustment alternatives with a view to integrating themselves into the environment more effectively. As 'talking about feelings with others helps us to negotiate meanings for emotional experience that are both personal and shared' (Planalp, 1999, p. 133), I believe that sojourners develop their understanding of emotions during their intercultural communication and adjustment processes in which they interact with other people in the host environment (including host students, university staff, other Chinese students, and so on) in order to guide or inform their adjustment choices. Such dynamic and interactive characteristics of individual sojourners' affective intercultural adjustment experiences are best captured by drawing on a research paradigm that focuses on examining processes, interpersonal interactions, and social practices. The social constructionism framework, which aims to explore 'how certain phenomena or forms of knowledge are achieved by people in interaction' in order to provide

explanations of 'the dynamics of social interaction' (Burr, 2003, p. 9), is therefore an appropriate research paradigm for this study.

### **3.3 Rationale for an ethnographic approach**

In this study, I explore the ways in which the participants' affective adjustment processes are produced and reproduced, negotiated and renegotiated, and transformed in their intercultural communication in specific sociocultural contexts, in order to gain a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the dynamics, uniqueness, and complexities of their affective adjustment experiences. Hence, the following areas must be closely examined: the group members' daily experiences of emotions in their intercultural encounters; the dynamic construction and negotiation processes of their understanding of emotions, which underpin or guide their adjustment actions; and, finally, the relevant sociocultural and historical contexts that both affect and are influenced by these understanding and actions.

The above aims and focuses have led me to adopt a qualitative approach in this study. To begin with, a qualitative approach is useful when the researcher wants to explore a research problem and expects a detailed, comprehensive understanding of this problem based on an understanding of the meaning individuals attach to it (Creswell, 2013). As previously established, the emotional aspect of intercultural adjustment is under-studied and needs further exploration. I am particularly interested in gaining an insight into the complexity of sojourners' intercultural adjustment by examining participants' own understanding of their emotional engagements in intercultural encounters; this is because individuals' emotional engagement is a very subjective issue and understanding their own perspective is therefore highly relevant to exploring such a topic. Moreover, a qualitative approach is appropriate 'when the researcher seeks to understand the context or settings of participants' (Creswell, 2013, p. 47). As previously stated, special attention is paid in this study to the

interactions between participants' affective intercultural adjustment experiences and the relevant contexts in which these experiences evolve in order to uncover the effects of contexts on the participants' experiences. I will therefore locate this study within a qualitative framework.

When considering a variety of alternatives to qualitative inquiry approaches, an ethnographic approach is specifically suited to the particular features of this study. First, in regard to the objective of this study, ethnography studies a cultural group that shares knowledge which shapes, informs, and explains the activities of the group members (Van Maanen, 2011). In my study, the group under investigation consists of thirteen Chinese taught Masters students living in the same hall of residence in a UK university. In addition to their shared Chinese primary and secondary socialization (which occurred respectively in their own families and in the society beyond their home, particularly at school; Berger and Luckmann, 1966), as both taught Masters students and live-in residents of university halls for a complete academic year, these thirteen students also shared similar sojourner experiences in a UK university in the same hall of residence to an extent. This group of students can therefore be seen as a group that shares knowledge which guide their activities.

Second, as to the focus of inquiry, an ethnographic study explores some aspects of a group's daily lives in specific contexts in order to reveal 'how these people view the situations they face, how they regard one another, and also how they see themselves' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 3). In this study, I aim to investigate the ways in which a group of Chinese students construct their understanding of emotions that evolve as they encounter the host environment, interact with and relate to people in this context, and present themselves during these encounters and engagements in their daily lives. Such exploration hopes to reveal the motivations, needs and goals, and value orientations that underpin the emotional meaning they attach to their intercultural communication experiences in the host context.

Third, as to the methods of inquiry, ethnographers carry out fieldwork that involves “living with and living like those who are studied” over a certain time period within specific contexts (Van Maanen, 2011, p. 2). As a Chinese doctoral student who also studied at the same university and lived in the same hall of residence as the cultural group members under consideration, I participated in and observed this group’s emotional lives within this context on a daily basis: from the beginning to the end of each group members’ taught Masters study journey (i.e., one year). The importance of conducting participant observations in this study lies in two areas. To begin with, it promoted mutual understanding and rapport between myself and participants (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte, 1999), which further enabled an open communication of information and in-depth discussions of emotional experiences in both interview and observation contexts, a relatively challenging task due to the private and sensitive concerns of individuals’ emotional experiences. Moreover, by engaging in the same events and situations with my participants in the research field on a daily basis, I was able to gain access to a wide range of their daily affective intercultural experiences in great depth, thereby helping me grasp the participants’ perceptions of these experiences and providing the basis for analysing the data I collected.

To sum up, this study shares the characteristics of an ethnographic study in terms of its object, focus, and methods of inquiry. As a result, I adopt an ethnography approach in this study. Furthermore, while this study is an academic ethnography, it also shares some characteristics with an applied ethnography. By exploring Chinese students’ emotional engagements in their intercultural encounters in a UK university, this study mainly aims to contribute to extant intercultural adjustment and intercultural competence literature; it is therefore “primarily theoretical in nature” (Fetterman, 2010, p.4). The findings of this study, however, also have practical implications for prospective Chinese international students, British universities, academic and supportive staff in British universities, and intercultural education in higher education (for more

detailed discussions of these issues, see the “Social and educational implications” section in Chapter 8). Although this study is academically-oriented, it can therefore also be applied in pragmatic and policy terms (Fetterman, 2010).

### **3.4 Data collection instruments, rationale, and processes**

Ethnographic research makes use of naturalistic methods to collect data, such as interviews and participant observation, in order to ensure sufficient multi-dimensional, intersubjective and social dialogues among the researcher, the participants and the research field (Angen, 2000). In this way, the ethnographers are managed to participate themselves in the inquiry processes with their participants in order to acquire and capture in-depth understandings based on participants’ own perspectives (i.e., an emic perspective) of the social realities under investigation (Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba, 2011). In this study, I adopted participant observation and ethnographic interviews as the data collection instruments. The following sub-sections outline the rationale, processes and related issues of the data collection procedure in this study.

#### **3.4.1 Access to the field**

My access to the research field was relatively smooth and straightforward. As a full time doctoral student at the same university and as a resident in the same hall of residence under study, I was entitled to fully engage in the majority of the social activities and events in these settings as an insider, i.e., a normal participant in the field under study, which enabled me to gain first-hand experience of participants’ daily intercultural encounters in the field and to grasp their perspectives more easily. I was therefore able to gain immediate access to the research field and close contact with my sample population – Chinese students living in a hall of residence of a UK university – without any negotiation to allow such admission. My identity as a natural insider and smooth access to the field helped to minimize the extent of the intrusiveness of

my study and facilitated the trust-building process between myself and my potential participants.

### **3.4.2 Pilot study**

Before the formal fieldwork began, a pilot study was conducted. This involved interviewing two female Chinese taught Masters students living in my hall of residence (the rationale for adopting interviews as one of the data collection instruments is detailed in 3.4.5). The two students both gained their undergraduate degrees from China in 2011, then immediately came to the UK to pursue their taught Masters degrees. One of them was my next-door neighbour in the hall of residence, and the other was a very sociable student. I had therefore built up a slightly stronger rapport with these students in comparison to other Chinese students in the hall. Both of them were happy to accept my invitation to be interviewed.

The design of the interview protocol was guided by my informal conversations about intercultural experiences with the Chinese students in the research field, as well as the focus of this study to explore Chinese students' understanding of and responses to their emotions as they adjust to the host environment. Interviews were conducted in students' own accommodation in the hall of residence. Each interview took approximately 70 minutes in length; they were then audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed.

When I reflected on my pilot study, several issues and implications emerged. First, I identified what needed to be improved in regard to my interviewing skills. For example, my tendency to speak too much in order to fill silences, which could alter and influence participants' thoughts as they planned their responses to my questions. Second, potentially leading questions were detected and revised. For example, the first question in the original protocol was about the participants' pre-departure expectations of their student lives in the UK. In my pilot study, however, both students explained that they had no specific pre-departure expectations. As a result, I removed this question from my



interview protocol. Third, the interviewing data showed that participants were able to verbalize and elaborate their understanding of emotions in intercultural communication in these interviews. For instance, they were both upset about their lack of interaction with host students, and they also struggled to maintain a balance between connecting with their Chinese friends while expanding their host network due to their limited personal energy. As such, my pilot study suggests that an interview is a powerful tool with which to probe and gather in-depth information regarding the meanings individuals' attach to their emotional experiences. It is therefore an appropriate method to adopt for this study.

### **3.4.3 The sample**

I recruited thirteen Chinese one-year taught Masters students as the participants of my study. These students studied in a UK university in which I also studied at a doctoral level; they also lived in the same hall with me. One-year taught Masters students were appropriate participants for my study because of the dialogic nature of their study mode, which involves a high level of interpersonal engagements and communication, including emotional engagements and communication. Moreover, the classes of taught Masters' students were typically international with a significant number of Chinese and non-Chinese students (i.e. other international students and home students from the UK). Students were therefore exposed to rich intercultural communication opportunities that could trigger various kinds of emotions in a taught Masters classroom context. In addition, according to my observations, the majority of Chinese students chose to study in the UK at a taught Masters level. By recruiting participants from this population, the findings of this study would therefore provide useful insights relevant to one of the largest groups of Chinese students in the UK.

Choosing students who lived in the hall of residence in which I also lived was based on three considerations. First, it enabled me to explore students'

emotional engagements in intercultural communication beyond the classroom context. Second, recruiting participants living in the same hall of residence ensured that they would share certain sojourner experiences to an extent. Third, it helped me to conduct the fieldwork and to approach the participants more naturally by acting as an 'insider', allowing me to engage with and observe the participant group in a less threatening and more natural, friendly way.

I recruited those who cared about my research topic and felt comfortable enough to share their relevant experiences with me as participants, a strategy followed Dean et al.'s (1967) principle of targeting those 'who are especially sensitive to the area of concern' and those identified as 'more-willing-to-reveal informants' (Dean et al. 1967, p. 285, cited in Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). I did not intentionally recruit participants based on standard demographic criteria, as some researchers do. This is because my primary aim was to develop an in-depth understanding of the phenomena under investigation, rather than pursuing representative and absolute conclusions about the phenomena (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

Yet, the participant population showed some demographic similarities. The majority of them acquired their undergraduate degrees from China in 2012 then immediately came to the UK to undertake the taught Masters programme beginning in the autumn of 2012 without any previous studying abroad experience. Only one student read a research Masters programme rather than a taught one; two students had one or two years of formal work experience before coming to the UK; and only one student had previous short-term studying abroad experience. With only one exception (i.e. the one who had two-year work experience), the majority of these students belonged to the age group of 20 – 24. Moreover, these students were female with only two exceptions. In this way, there were many shared characteristics within this group of students and the homogeneous nature of the participant group may improve the transferability of the research findings.

Table 1 presents the profiles of the participant group, with previous work and studying abroad experience, age group, and gender.

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Previous work experience</b>	<b>Previous studying abroad experience</b>	<b>Age group</b>	<b>Gender</b>
<b>A</b>	No	No	20-24	F
<b>B</b>	No	No	20-24	F
<b>C</b>	No	No	20-24	F
<b>D</b>	One year	No	20-24	F
<b>E</b>	No	No	20-24	F
<b>F</b>	No	No	20-24	F
<b>G</b>	No	No	20-24	F
<b>H</b>	No	No	20-24	F
<b>I</b>	No	No	20-24	F
<b>J</b>	No	Three months	20-24	F
<b>K</b>	No	No	20-24	F
<b>L</b>	Two years	No	25-29	F
<b>M</b>	No	No	20-24	F

**Table 1 Profiles of the participant group**

#### **3.4.4 Participant observation**

The focus of this study requires the researcher to examine a group's daily behaviour and perceptions and to develop an in-depth grasp of both.

Participant observation is one powerful tool through which to achieve this aim: by acting as a participant in terms of directly involving oneself with the group's

daily lives and constantly interacting with the group members in the research field, the ethnographer develops an insider's/emic perspective (i.e., the perspective of the people under study; Fetterman, 2010) of the phenomena under investigation; by performing the role of an observer in terms of keeping a professional distance from the participants and the research field from time to time, as well as constantly reflecting on his/her own research experiences, the ethnographer gains additional insight into the research phenomena based on an outsider's/etic view (i.e., the view of the researcher; Fetterman, 2010); by mediating between these two roles and perspectives and engaging in relevant research events in the field, an in-depth, comprehensive, and critical interpretation of the phenomena under investigation can be obtained (Creswell, 2013; Fetterman, 2010).

I started my participant observation from the first day that these participants moved into the hall of residence under study until the end of their taught Masters programme. The following paragraphs discuss the selection of the observation environments, as well as the focus of and my role in the observation.

I chose to conduct my participant observation mainly in the hall of residence environment in which the participants and I were live-in members for the following reasons. To begin with, the hall of residence environment was one of the main settings in which participants involve themselves in various kinds of social events or activities. Hence, participating and observing in this environment helped me to gain important insight into the characteristics of these participants' social lives in the university context, thereby informing my own understandings of their ordinary emotional engagements in these social situations. Second, as emotion was often seen as a rather sensitive and elusive topic, the method of observation needed to be carefully considered if reliable findings were to be expected. I did not choose to observe participants' emotional engagements in the classroom context, as I had no compulsory modules to take for my degree unlike my participants; therefore, I did not share

an 'insider's' status with my participants in the classroom. In contrast, in the hall of residence environment, I was automatically identified by the participants as an 'insider', i.e., a Chinese resident, in addition to being a researcher. This allowed me to conduct observations in an unobtrusive and unthreatening style in most cases, which helped to minimize the 'reactivity effects (the effects of the researcher on the researched, changing the behaviour of the latter)' (Cohen et al., 2011, p.465) on participants' emotional engagements during the observing processes (see 3.6.1 for relevant ethical discussions regarding this approach).

As clarified in Chapter 1, the aim of this study is to explore the processes of and reasons for Chinese students' affective intercultural adjustment experiences. A major focus of my participant observations was therefore to see how the participants acted or were likely to act given their experiences of emotions in their intercultural encounters. As such, special attention was paid to specific cues of emotions (such as facial expressions, body languages, as well as action and verbal cues; Planalp, 1999) that were directly associated with the participants' actions (either real or anticipated) in their intercultural encounters. Based on this consideration, I specified the issues I would focus on during the observations (see Appendix 6). For instance, I observed the participants' facial expressions, body language, and/or verbal cues that revealed their willingness to be involved in certain intercultural interactional situations; the ways they communicated attitudes and opinions to other non-Chinese people; their daily interactions with other Chinese students in relation to their attitudes on connecting with non-Chinese people in the field; their emotional talk (e.g., help-seeking, complaints), which was related to the academic or social challenges they encountered; and so on.

During the participant observation processes, I was engaged in various kinds of roles that were often negotiated between me and the participants. Specifically, I found myself constantly positioned somewhere on a continuum between a 'complete participant' and a 'participant-as-observer' (Gold, 1958). A

‘complete participant’s’ role involves the ethnographer acting as an insider of the group while the research is in fact unknown to the group members; whereas, a ‘participant-as-observer’ carries out the research while fully participating in the field (Gold, 1958). The following paragraphs explain in more detail my engagement with these two roles and the role negotiation processes in the field.

As a live-in member of the hall of residence under study, I was always entitled to fully participate in all social activities and events for students in the hall of residence as an insider, which was helpful for conducting observations in a less intrusive and threatening manner. Hence, at the beginning of the study when the rapport and trust between myself and the participants were still developing, I chose to behave as a ‘complete participant’ in the field. This meant fully immersing myself in the social situations under observation and engaging in relevant activities and events as the participants also attended; in these instances, no participant was aware of being observed in order to decrease the reactivity effects (see 3.7.1 for relevant ethical discussions regarding this approach).

As the rapport between me and the participants enhanced during the progression of my study, more details of the research were disclosed to my participants, which gradually shifted my role towards the ‘participant-as-observer’s’ end of the continuum. This was especially the case when I invited students to participate in my study at the end of November 2012, and when the first round of ethnographic interviews was conducted (detailed below in 3.4.5). In these situations, my observer’s role came to the fore (see 3.7.1 for relevant ethical discussions regarding this approach).

After the first round of interviews, I continued my hall of residence life alongside my participants. At this stage, it can be argued that in most cases my observations were still being conducted in a ‘complete participant’s’ way, as participants could forget that they were being observed given the fact that they knew me socially (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). There were notable

exceptions, however, when some participants voluntarily shared their intercultural communication experiences with me which they felt 'may be helpful to your study' (quoted from one participant's comments). In such situations, my role as a researcher returned to these participants' consciousness, as our interactions took on clear research aims and became more like mini-interviews than casual conversations. Once more, in such cases I performed the role of a 'participant-as-observer'.

### **3.4.5 Ethnographic interviews**

The task of developing an emic, comprehensive and in-depth understanding of a group of Chinese students' conceptions, values, beliefs and attitudes of their emotional lives in intercultural communication is challenging, as meanings of emotions can be quite unconscious, subtle and unique. Also, as stated earlier in this chapter, in addition to exploring participants' understandings about emotions, I am also interested in investigating the effects of relevant sociocultural and historical contexts on these understandings. Hence, a research method which is good at verbalizing individuals' ideas, capturing the uniqueness and richness of individuals' meanings attached to emotions as well as outlining the features of relevant contexts in which these meanings evolve is essential for this study. As a result, I adopted ethnographic interviews as the main data collection instrument in this study for the following reasons. First, it is characterized by ethnographers' direct interactions with participants which facilitate participants to put their thinking about emotions into words. Second, by valuing participants' own words and perspectives as well as encouraging them to elaborate their ideas in the interviewing processes, ethnographic interviews effectively probe the diversity and richness of participants' meaning world without imposing researchers' understandings to participants (Dick, 2006; Partington, 2001). Third, ethnographic interviewing data is contextual in its nature and interpreting such data requires referring back to relevant contexts and identifying their features which shape the data (Brewer, 2000; Dick, 2006).

As a result, ethnographic interviews is useful to make participants' unique, rich and complex understandings about emotions explicit as well as to unfold the ways relevant contexts impinge on these understandings, which matches my research aims and focuses and is therefore an appropriate data collection instrument for this study.

The following paragraphs outline the design and procedures of the ethnographic interviews conducted in this study, followed by discussions about the important issues emerged in the interviewing process.

#### Rounds, types, and the focus of ethnographic interviews

This study follows a longitudinal approach with the view to helping me to produce a more dynamic and comprehensive picture of participants' emotional lives throughout their entire taught Masters study period. Two rounds of ethnographic interviews were conducted during the academic year 2012/2013, which took place in the Christmas vacation and the summer vacation of that year respectively. As mentioned in the previous section, prolonged participant observation in the research field was also conducted during this period. The value of adopting a longitudinal approach was that, first of all, participants' experiences and perspectives may be ever-changing, and a longitudinal study enabled me to collect more time-sensitive accounts with the aim of gaining insights into the relationship between time and meaning making processes (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007) so that the participants' dynamic emotional lives during their taught Masters study period can be better captured. Moreover, conducting the second round of interviews helped me check my own understandings of the previous information revealed in the first round, as well as to probe further information if necessary (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

There were 26 interviews in total, which were conducted in the participants' own accommodations. All the interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. In the first round, based on an initial grasp of the field gained from early observations, more open-ended and unstructured interviews were conducted



(see Appendices 1 and 2 for the Chinese and English versions of the first round interview guide) with the aim of eliciting and identifying the main themes of participants' emotional engagements in their intercultural encounters from their own perspectives. I focused on discussing participants' emotional responses and the reasons for such responses as they engaged in intercultural encounters within various academic and social situations, such as participating in classroom or group discussions, completing academic assignments, preparing for academic assessments, interacting with academic staff and classmates, building a social network in the university, attending students' social activities in the university, and so on. This helped me to gain an overall picture of the kind of emotional encounters participants had in their intercultural communication within the research context, as well as an initial grasp of the processes and underlying reasons for these encounters from their own perspective. At this stage, I was uncertain about what issues were perceived as relevant for my study focus by the participants. Hence, unstructured interviews were more useful in terms of learning from participants and raising initial awareness of what needs to be explored further (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Accordingly, in the first round of interviews, quite a lot of information-eliciting questions were posed. In other words, questions focused on eliciting descriptive accounts of the perceived important features of participants' emotional experiences in the field, what Spradley (1979, p. 87) calls 'grand tour' and 'mini-tour' questions. The following are examples of a grand tour and a mini-tour question respectively:

*A grand tour question*

请你描述一下你来英国之后，在哪些学习环境中与外国人（学校教职员工，学生，等等）有过交流？

Please describe in what academic situations you had communication or interactions with non-Chinese (e.g., university academic staff, students, etc.) in the UK?

*A mini-tour question*

请告诉我当你在这些学习环境中与外国人（学校教职员工，学生，等等）交流的时候，各自产生了什么样的感受（例如：幸福感、成就感、被认同感、迷惑、不被认同感、害怕、焦虑、孤单、无助……）？

Please describe what kinds of feelings (e.g. happiness, success, approval, confusion, disapproval, fear, anxiety, loneliness, helplessness...) you experienced when communicating or interacting with non-Chinese (e.g., university academic staff, students, etc.) in these academic situations?

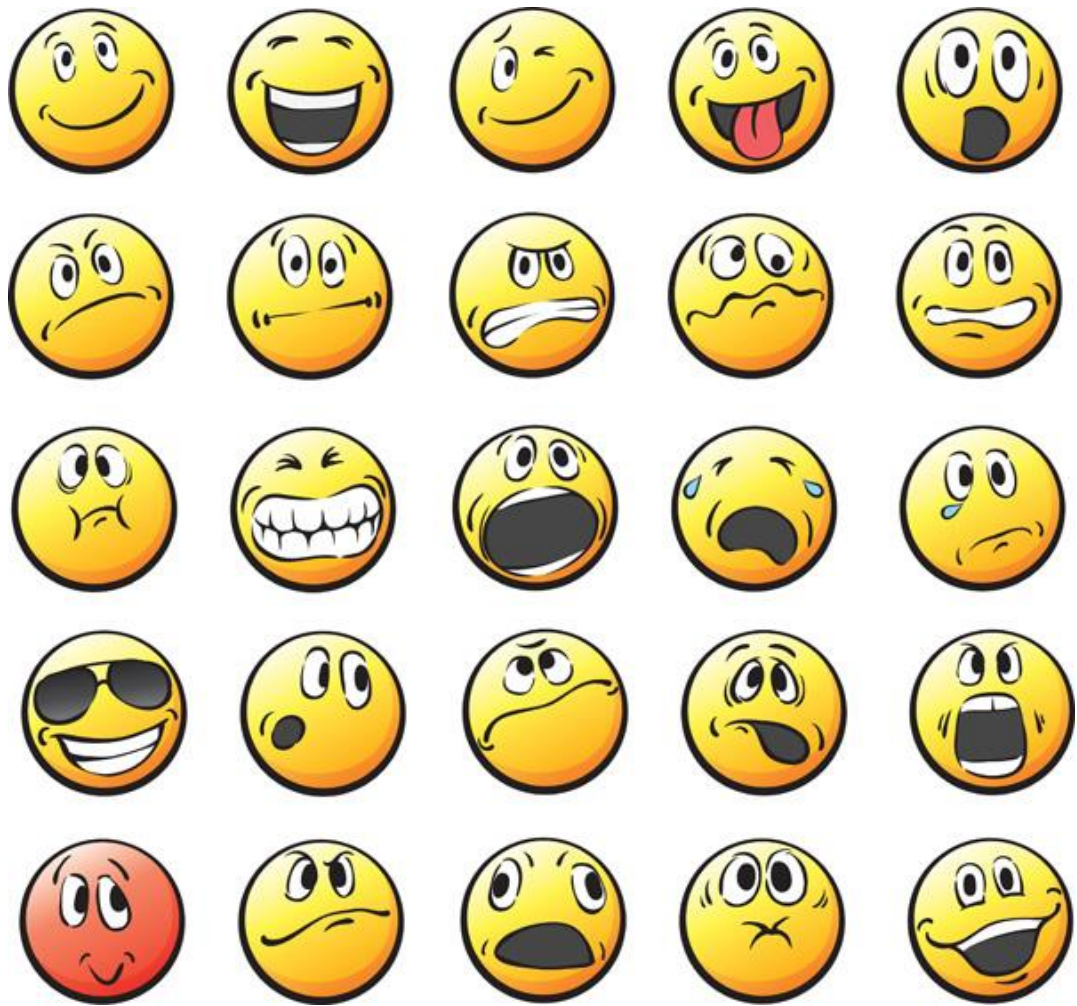
These questions enabled me to get a general picture of how participants experience emotions in intercultural communication before exploring them in a more in-depth and systematic way. After that, some ‘more focused questions’ were raised in order to better ‘understand local perceptions and categorizations of experience’ (Johnson and Weller, 2001, p. 497). In addition, at the end of each interview, I invited participants to talk about anything they felt to be particularly important and relevant to the research focus that was not mentioned previously in the interviews. This raised an opportunity to gain access to and to analyse perceived unusual or irregular experiences in addition to the frequent and routine ones in the field, in order to capture a more complex, holistic, and individually unique overview of the realities of emotions in intercultural encounters. From my point of view, asking such a kind of questions ensured me to effectively explore the variety and complexity of participants’ understandings of and actions towards emotions in intercultural communication. This helped me to develop both common and diverse understandings of the shared tacit knowledge of emotions within the sample.

The aims of the second round of interviews were two-fold. First, participants were presented with a list of emotions (see Appendices 3 and 4 for the Chinese and English versions of the second round interview guide in which the list is included). The list consisted of those emotions that were most commonly discussed as well as those perceived as important by only a few participants in the first round of interviews, with a view of covering both common and individually specific topics in the second round of interviews. Participants were

then invited to choose one or more emotions from the list and talk about their relevant experiences around these emotions which took place between the first and second rounds, and to compare and contrast these experiences with their previous relevant experiences mentioned in the first round. This “compare and contrast” type of questioning was aimed at probing participants’ potential developments and/or changes in the ways they construct and negotiate the meanings of the themes identified in the first round data, as well as the underlying reasons for these developments and/or changes. In summary, in the second round, by asking participants to consciously compare/contrast and reflect on their experiences at different points, time-sensitive accounts of participants’ emotions in their intercultural encounters can be elicited.

Second, in the second round, participants were invited to talk about other important emotional events and experiences that occurred after the first round, which may be unrelated to or cannot be fully captured by the emotions on the list. This helped to enhance the breadth of the investigation and to provide a more holistic and time-sensitive picture of the research phenomena.

During the interviewing processes, I used visual prompting technique with a view to helping participants to verbalize their emotions more easily when necessary. Specifically, the visual prompt refers to a chart of online chatting facial expressions which indicated various emotions including universal ones, i.e., anger, happiness, disgust, surprise, fear, and sadness (Boucher and Brandt, 1981) (see below):



**Figure 1 The visual eliciting tool in ethnographic interviews**

In Appendix 5, I summarise the key information about the two rounds of ethnographic interviews, including the format, interview date, and duration of each interview.

#### Interviewing language

In my view, the choice of interviewing language should facilitate participants to articulate their emotional experiences in a detailed and nuanced manner, given the complex and rich nature of emotional experiences. Participants' mother tongue, i.e., Mandarin Chinese, was therefore a more desirable interviewing language to adopt in this study. This seemed to match participants' own expectations of the interviewing language as revealed by their responses to my invitation to participate in the study, such as 'Can I use Chinese (in interviews)?' or 'Which language are you going to use in interviews?' I still gave

all participants the freedom to choose their own interviewing languages, however, in order to ensure they used the one with which they felt most comfortable at specific interviewing moments. All participants chose to use Mandarin Chinese in interviews, although code switching on a word and phrase level was not uncommon. In a few cases, whole English sentences were used mainly with the aim of repeating what others said in English.

### **3.5 Data analysis**

Thematic analysis was adopted as the data analytical method in this study. The following sub-sections explain why I chose a thematic analysis approach in this study and discuss the major issues in the data analysis process.

#### **3.5.1 Rationale for a thematic analysis approach**

A thematic analysis approach was chosen in this study for two reasons. First, I had concerns about reporting the emotional realities within a cultural group and exploring the underlying assumptions of these realities, as well as the relevant social context issues that affected these realities. Thematic analysis matched my analytical concerns as it can be conducted from a 'contextualist' analytical perspective, which focuses on presenting individuals' experiences and interpretations of emotions straightforwardly, as well as examining the assumptions, ideas, and relevant social contexts that underpin and/or interact with these experiences and meanings (Braun and Clarke, 2006). This approach was therefore appropriate for this study in terms of its analytical focuses.

Second, thematic analysis is capable of both data-driven (i.e., inductive) and theory-driven (i.e., deductive) analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The research questions of this study informed and structured the data analysis (i.e., a deductive approach), but they also emerged and developed throughout the analysis process (i.e., an inductive approach). Furthermore, the development of themes throughout the study involved an interaction between examining the data itself in detail in order to identify candidate themes (i.e., an inductive

approach) and referring to relevant theories in order to fine-tune candidate themes (i.e., a deductive approach). Data analysis was therefore conducted in this study through both deductive and inductive approaches.

### **3.5.2 Issues in the data analysis process**

In this subsection I outline the major issues that emerged during the data analysis process, including transcribing, translating, and coding.

#### **Transcribing**

In qualitative research, the conventional way to process the interviewing audio record is to transform it into its textual form, so that the researcher can analyse it. In my study, I transcribed all interactional situations that occurred during the interviewing process, including casual conversations and unexpected ‘interruptions’. These helped me to restore the interviewing context in the transcriptions as completely as possible.

As to who transcribes the interviewing records, Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that it is desirable for researchers themselves to transcribe their interviews, as this not only helps the researchers to familiarize themselves with the data, but also promotes a thorough understanding of the data from the researchers’ perspective. In this study I therefore transcribed all of the data myself.

#### **Translating**

As previously shown, the working language in the interviews of this study was Mandarin Chinese, while the language used to write up the study was English. As different language systems carry different cultural meanings, translating the data set into another language can distort the original emic perspectives underpinning the data (Chen, 2009). I therefore coded and analysed my data in its original language, i.e., Mandarin Chinese, and only translated those quotations (from the participants) presented in my thesis into English, with a view to minimizing the loss or misrepresentation of the original meanings during the translation process. My awareness of such a limitation of translation

also drove my decision of presenting my interview quotations in both their original and translated forms. In the data analysis chapters, each interview quotation in Chinese was presented first for the reader's examination of its original meaning, followed by my own translated version of the quotation in English.

Translating Chinese words associated with emotions into English is not an easy task, as different languages symbolize the world of reality in different ways (Wahyu, 2009). Therefore, direct translation of words associated with emotions between languages is not always possible, since two apparently equivalent words may not always express exactly the same emotional meanings, or may even represent very different emotional experiences (Hurtado de Mendoza, 2008; Wahyu, 2009). This, in turn, raises the challenges of adequately and accurately capturing the key meaning of the original terms in their corresponding translations.

I encountered such kinds of challenges as I translated certain key words related to emotions in Chinese into English. For instance, I noticed that the meanings of the word “热情” (which could mean strong excitement about something, a warm interpersonal manner, or the characteristics of an outgoing personality) were different from the ones of its English equivalent “enthusiastic” (which normally refers to strong excitement about somebody/something; Oxford Dictionaries, 2016); hence, it was inappropriate to equate “enthusiastic” to “热情” in my translation. I also discovered that the participants used the word “热情” to refer to different things in different interviewing occasions. It was therefore important to refer back to relevant language contexts in order to accurately grasp the exact meaning of “热情” in each specific context, so that I could then choose the appropriate translation word accordingly. Moreover, a detailed analysis of the word “真诚” and its English equivalent “sincerity” made me realized that although there was overlapping meaning between the two words, they did not share exactly the same central conceptual features in their meaning. Therefore, inspired by Hurtado de Mendoza et al.'s (2010)

encyclopaedic approach to translation with a view to translating emotion words at the level of specific conceptual features, I felt it was important to highlight the essential conceptual features of “真诚” in its corresponding English translation so that the key meaning of this word can be fully conveyed in its translation. The detailed information on the above translation decisions and practices will be elaborated in the relevant data analysis chapters (see sections 4.2.1, 5.3.1, and 5.3.2).

To sum up, translating words related to emotions between languages is a challenging task as “translation of apparently equivalent emotion terms does not guarantee an adequate translation of their corresponding representations of emotional experience” (Hurtado de Mendoza et al., 2010, p. 662), and thus direct translation of such kinds of words is put into question. To improve translation accuracy, it is therefore important to examine the relevant language contexts in which the meaning of the word associated with emotions is embedded (Wahyu, 2009), to conduct a detailed analysis of the central conceptual features the word represents (Hurtado de Mendoza, 2008; Hurtado de Mendoza et al., 2010), and then “to see to what extent and in which ways it [an emotion concept] might differ and overlap with other emotion concepts in other cultures” (Hurtado de Mendoza, 2008, p. 244).

### Coding

In this study, data was coded and analysed in the workspace of Nvivo 10, qualitative data analysis software. Due to the relatively large data set, as well as the complexity of my data analysis approach (a combination of both data-driven and theory-driven approaches, as elaborated above in 3.5.1), using this software helped me to manage and analyse my data in a more organized manner. I followed Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six steps when carrying out my thematic analysis of the data, which included the six following phases:

1. Familiarising oneself with the data
2. Generating initial codes



3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

In phase one, I familiarized myself with the data by transcribing all of them by myself. I printed out all of the transcriptions, read and re-read them, and noted down my initial ideas for coding that came to me during this data familiarizing process.

In phase two, I coded the entire data set in a data-driven way. The content of all data was coded with the aim to depict the richness, diversity, and uniqueness of the participants' emotional experiences in their intercultural encounters. In the workspace of Nvivo 10, each segment of data was coded as a free 'node' with a heading to match the relevant extracts from the data text. I made detailed headings that depicted the main contents of the nodes, and the words used in the headings were the same as or close to participants' own phrases (see Appendix 9 for an example of coding in Nvivo 10). This helped me to quickly recall the main points of the nodes from participants' own perspectives without referring back to the original text extracts for each specific node. I then grouped these nodes into potential themes (detailed below).

In phase three, I underwent three stages in my theme-searching process. First, I collated the relevant nodes into four folders named 'Chapter 4', 'Chapter 5', 'Chapter 6' and 'Chapter 7' in my Nvivo project, with the aim of further analysing these nodes in order to provide answers to my three research questions. Specifically, the nodes in 'Chapter 4' and 'Chapter 5' were related to the participants' understanding of their emotions, as well as the perceived relevant factors that influenced their understanding, thereby indicating answers to the first and third research questions. Meanwhile, the nodes in 'Chapter 6' and 'Chapter 7' were focused on the participants' responses to emotions and their conditional factors, intimating answers to the second and third research questions. Second, I started to search for themes in the nodes of each folder in

a data-driven manner with the hope of capturing a comprehensive picture of all the issues related to emotions that emerged in the data set as a whole. During this stage, however, I gradually realized that emotion was a very complex topic, which involved a variety of issues that could be understood and investigated from different disciplinary perspectives. Given the limited scope of study in one PhD project, a decision needed to be made as to what exactly I wished to focus on and further explore, thereby enabling me to conduct my data analysis in a much more focused way. Bearing in mind this study's main research aim of exploring intercultural phenomena, in the third stage of this phase I revisited the relevant literature, particularly in the field of intercultural communication; from this I sought concepts of emotion that would help to make sense of my data in relation to my research questions and therefore provide potential focuses for my theme-searching process (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). For example, I searched for relevant concepts and theories of intercultural adjustment processes with which to frame my analysis of the participants' responses to their emotions, and drew on theories regarding affective intercultural competence to analyse relevant data that captured the participants' value transformations during their adjustment processes. These procedures enabled me to answer my second research question: how do Chinese students respond to their emotions in their intercultural and adjustment processes in the host environment?

It is evident from the above that this phase of searching for themes in my study was characterized by an interaction between the data-driven and theory-driven approaches of analysing data. During the theme-searching process, the nodes I created in the previous phase were constantly grouped and regrouped, re-coded and/or un-coded; the potential themes and sub-themes were gradually established and refined; and the hierarchical structures of the meanings of my data gradually became more developed and clearer.

Phases 4, 5, and 6 were entwined with one another. This was a recursive process instead of a linear one (Braun and Clarke, 2006). After collating all of

the codes into potential themes, I started the writing up process of my findings reports, discussed the preliminary findings with my supervisors, and worked back and forth among my data repeatedly. For instance, I initially divided the participants' emotional experiences into 'academic' and 'social' categories. After some time, however, I gradually discovered that some experiences, although occurring within different contexts, can actually be captured by one theme instead of being separated merely on the basis of contextual differences. I therefore combined the relevant themes together in order to form one theme in my later versions of the findings reports.

As suggested by the previous discussions, the data analysis process in this study turned out to be demanding and complex; yet, eventually the phenomena under study became clear through such an analytical process. This in turn led to the development of the four findings chapters (Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7) with the aim of answering the three research questions of this study.

### **3.6 Reflexivity**

According to Altheide and Johnson (1998), reflexivity means that the researcher is influenced by and influences the cultures, settings, and contexts he/she studies and represents. Hence, it is impossible for a researcher to eliminate his/her own voice from the representation of reality, and those who assume that social realities can be accurately captured without the effects of researchers' agency fall into the trap of so-called "naive realism" (Hammersley, 1990, p. 5). As an ethnographer, I have adopted Hammersley and Atkinson's (2007) view that the social character the researcher needs to be fully acknowledged, as they state that "[a]ll social research is founded on the human capacity for participant observation. We act in the social world and yet are able to reflect upon ourselves and our actions as objects in that world" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 18). To me, the researcher's character – behaving as an inseparable part of the social world under study while simultaneously acting as

an observer of that world – is in fact the foundation upon which he/she conducts research. It is because of this character that researchers are capable of describing social realities under study as objects in the world, rather than simply as their pure perceptions of realities or their ‘dreams’ of them (Hammersley, 1992, cited in Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). As such, I see myself as more committed to the epistemological position of so-called “critical realism”, based on Bhasker’s work (1989, cited in Brewer, 2000). Bhasker claims that social realities are the ever-changing products of reproduction and transformation processes brought about by humans’ daily activities and actions. Social realities are therefore neither entities outside of human agency nor pure products of human construction.

As a result, when undertaking research, it is necessary to bear in mind that a researcher’s identity and how he/she understands the social world have essential implications for the whole research project (Guba and Lincoln, 1994); the researcher needs to provide accounts that reflect his/her integrity as a researcher, as well as the research processes, in order to achieve the goal of being reflexive in their study (Brewer, 2000). From my perspective, this means that when reporting data collection and analysis processes as well as the research findings, it is crucial to fully acknowledge the effects of the role the ethnographer and his/her participation in the field play (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). In this way, sound, justifiable accounts of the social phenomena under study can be produced, which overcome the drawbacks of naive realism – such as attempts to deny or eliminate the effects of researchers’ agency – ‘without undermining the commitment of research to realism’ (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p. 17). The following paragraphs therefore provide reflexive accounts of the effects of the researcher’s personality, position in the field, and experiences of the phenomena under study on data collection and interpretation processes.

In this research, I adopted the position of a nastic and introverted person who valued listening to others and understanding their thinking and feelings in

interpersonal contact. Inhabiting such a role is not difficult for me, as it reflects a part of my character in my daily social life. This role enabled me to enact the communicative skills to which competent ethnographers need to subscribe, such as showing interest, ignorance, and empathy towards participants, withholding pre-judgement when listening to them, and encouraging others to elaborate their ideas in conversations (Dick, 2006; Partington, 2001; Johnson and Weller, 2001). Accordingly, I tended to use open-ended questions in order to initiate conversations and to raise follow-up questions in order to move the communication to a deeper level, both of which are perceived as crucial skills that ensure high quality ethnographic interviews (Spradley, 1979; Partington, 2001). Such a questioning technique aims to create an interviewing environment that is less threatening and more emotionally supportive in order to encourage participants to share their experiences as openly as possible. This was especially challenging in my research context, as issues related to emotions can be very sensitive and personal. Hence, the quality of data may be highly compromised if the interviewing environment was perceived as unsupportive.

As a young Chinese doctoral student who studied in the same university and lived in the same hall of residence as the participants, and who had previously studied in the same university at a taught Masters level, I shared many commonalities with the participants: our mother tongue (i.e., Mandarin Chinese); a shared cultural and historical background; similar studying abroad and hall of residence experiences; and so on. As a result, I felt that participants saw me more as a student whom they knew well than as a researcher, which is reflected in how they referred to me: ‘学姐’ (‘the senior’). These common points facilitated the development of the researcher’s insider status, thereby decreasing the perceived power distances and enhanced mutual understanding, trust, and rapport between participants and the researcher (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). Hence, my insider identity helped participants feel more able to verbalize their complex emotional experiences and to enhance in-depth

discussions in interviews, as well as to promote my emic understanding of the data.

This insider status, however, comes with its own limitations. For one thing, in interviews some participants seemed quite relaxed and talked in a very casual way so that it became more like a daily conversation or a long talk without any clear points or focuses. In such situations, I lacked the confidence to guide these participants towards saying something more 'to the point' without making them feel that I did not care about or disliked their ideas. Furthermore, I was concerned about missing potentially useful information if I interrupted them too frequently. The outcome of this was a few interviewing records of an excessive length (i.e., between 2.5 to 3 hours) in my first round of interviews when I was in the early stages of my researcher role and therefore uncertain about what was relevant and important from the participants' perspectives. In the later stages, as my researcher skills and understanding of the focuses of my investigations gradually improved, the problem of over-long interviews was overcome (see Appendix 5 for the length of interviews).

Another restriction was that I could become too close to the participant group due to this insider status and may therefore run the risk of losing an outsider's view of their experiences. Erickson (1973) suggests that the task of the ethnographer is to see the familiar through a new pair of lenses; in other words, to make the familiar strange in order to interpret the familiar from a fresh perspective. In order to achieve this goal, I actively socialized with non-Chinese students in the university to gain chances to discuss their intercultural communication experiences with Chinese students. This facilitated my own reflection on the data in terms of regaining certain levels of curiosity about relatively familiar thoughts, feelings, and behaviour, in order to discover the potential blind spots in my mind and to develop a relatively fresh perspective on the same social phenomena. For instance, I used to agree with many of the participants' belief that the lack of interaction between Chinese and host students was mainly attributed to host students' unwillingness to

communicate with international students. Having interacted with many non-Chinese students in the hall of residence under study, however, I discovered that some host students also wondered whether Chinese students were bothered about participating in the host environment. As such, my interactions with host students caused me to reflect on my previous opinions, which in turn made me realize that the separation between Chinese and host groups was the result of mutual suspicion regarding the other group's unwillingness to be engaged in intercultural communication, thereby transforming my previous opinion on this issue. Such a transformation may act as the basis for developing a more critical view on the data.

### **3.7 Ethical issues**

In this study, three key ethical issues emerged during the fieldwork and data analysis processes: informed consent, confidentiality, as well as intervention and reciprocity.

#### **3.7.1 Informed consent**

In the ethnographic interviewing part of my fieldwork, the issues of informed consent were relatively straightforward. Before conducting the interviews, I obtained ethical approval from the Ethics Advisory Committee of the university in which I studied. I gave all participants a brief oral summary of my study and its uses when inviting them to participate in the interviews, and I gained all participants' oral consent before the first round of interviews. I had also planned to send each of them a more elaborate information sheet about my study (see Appendix 7) for their own reference. Not all of them seemed to take it seriously, however, as one participant asked: 'Do I have to get that written summary? If not I would prefer not to receive it.' I did not therefore send the written summary to that participant, as it seemed unnecessary and rather intrusive to insist on providing further details when participants were disinterested (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007). All participants were asked to

sign a consent form (see Appendix 8) which took place before or soon after the first round of interviews, and I gathered all signed forms before the second-round interview.

However, informed consent issues in my participant observation were more complicated. As emotions are a sensitive and often elusive topic, telling participants that their emotional lives were going to be observed day-by-day could be very risky in terms of alarming them or potentially distorting my observations. This was especially the case at the beginning of the fieldwork, when the rapport and mutual trust between participants and the ethnographer was still very fragile and under-developed. Yet I felt it was desirable for participants to be informed as long as the trustworthiness of the study was not compromised. Hence, I informed participants that observation was part of my fieldwork when inviting them to participate in my study at the end of November 2012, as at that point the rapport and trust between myself and participants was much more advanced. Furthermore, I assured them that they had the freedom to make any inquiries into my previous observations, as well as to withdraw from my study at any time. It turned out that the majority of students invited to participate were not concerned about this ethical aspect of my study. Among them, only one student asked some brief questions about my previous observations before agreeing to participate in my study, and the rest showed a willingness to participate without reservation. Therefore, it seems that the effects of intrusiveness and reactivity of observation were minimized in this study.

### **3.7.2 Confidentiality**

Confidentiality was another important ethical concern in my study, as people's experiences of emotions are often very personal and private. As a result, any issues of confidentiality needed to be carefully considered when collecting data and reporting the findings.



In some occasions during the formal fieldwork period, some participants resorted to me for emotional support and advice. A confidential concern arose here: given the principle of not violating participants' privacy, I was faced with the question of what could be treated as data and what therefore could legitimately be reported in my findings chapters which may be accessed by the public. My strategy was to send relevant parts of my findings to the concerned participants and to ask whether they felt the information presented within these findings was confidential in their eyes; and I omitted the information they did not wish to share with the public from my findings chapters.

Moreover, before conducting interviews, I explained to all participants that they had the right to remain anonymous. When reporting my findings, names of the participants and other relevant people, the hall of residence, departments, and universities were all replaced by different capital letters.

### **3.7.3 Intervention and reciprocity**

The interventional effects of qualitative research are often seen as intrusive because people need to adjust to the presence of someone with a research purpose in the specific setting (Marshall and Rossman, 2011). Hence, it is essential that the researcher rewards people's participation in the study in order to achieve the goal of reciprocity, so that participants do not feel 'used' (Creswell, 2013). In this study, in addition to an ethnographer, I was also seen as a natural 'insider' in the research field because of my Chinese doctoral student identity and live-in membership in the hall of residence under study. This helped me to greatly minimize the interventional effects of my study in the following aspects. First, when I initially met my participants, I was already in the research field and was known as a Chinese postgraduate student, as well as a live-in member of participants' hall of residence; in other words, I was seen as an 'insider' rather than as a researcher. Second, as international students studying abroad, both the participants and I were involved in intercultural encounters as part of our daily lives; and intercultural interaction was also a common topic in

our everyday conversations. This made sharing and discussing intercultural communication experiences in ethnographic interviews and participant observations much less intrusive. As such, the interventional effects of this study were lessened because of my natural 'insider' identity in the research field.

This identity also allowed me to reward my participants in a unique way that may differ from other researchers without such an identity. First, as participants came to the UK with the acquisition of a successful study performance as one of their central goals, they tended to trust and rely on the learning abroad experiences of a Chinese senior student who had already successfully completed her taught Masters in the UK. Hence, I gained the opportunity to reward my participants by giving my academic support and advice whenever necessary. Furthermore, getting involved with the data collection processes of this study (e.g., being interviewed and voluntarily sharing their intercultural experiences with the ethnographer for research purposes in participant observations – see details in sub-section 3.4.4) itself helped participants gain a unique insight into the research process, thereby providing invaluable experience that may have been useful to their own Masters dissertation research.

Second, as I was also a young Chinese female international student who shared many similar feelings with my participants about intercultural encounters, a few participants sometimes resorted to me for emotional support during the fieldwork process, as previously mentioned. Hence, I was able to support them emotionally at times. Since emotions are the central focus of this study, however, I ultimately adopted a more careful and reserved approach with the view of minimizing the interventional effects of the researcher while still effectively rewarding my participants. My opinions and advice were therefore only given when they were desperately needed, and I assured the participants that these were only my personal views and also encouraged them to seek other forms of support. This strategy was based on my view that some

participants could come to rely too heavily on my ideas, as I had spent a longer time in the field and could therefore be seen as more 'experienced'.

In addition, participating in this study itself also gave participants the opportunity to critically reflect on their own intercultural communication experiences from an emotional perspective, which further rewarded them with a potentially useful way of dealing with their emotional issues during the studying abroad period.

### **3.8 Trustworthiness**

The principle with which to assess the quality of qualitative research is trustworthiness (criteria include credibility, transferability, dependability, and conformability), which involves a set of assessment procedures, such as prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, thick description, and so on (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The central focus of these procedures is to examine whether there are sufficient interactions between the phenomenon under study, the researcher, the research aims, and the audience of the research, as it is during these interaction processes that evidence of trustworthiness evolves (Altheide and Johnson, 2011). In the following subsections, I will therefore examine the four aspects of trustworthiness as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) by outlining details of the relevant interaction processes as evidence of each respective aspect.

#### **3.8.1 Credibility**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), credibility in qualitative studies refers to adequate representations of the multiple social constructions under investigation and the ways of improving credibility including prolonged engagement, persistent observation, peer debriefing, and so on. The following paragraphs elaborate the coordination of these respective practices in my study.

*Prolonged engagement:* As depicted previously in this chapter, I had a prolonged engagement with the participants and the research field for nearly eleven months by living in the same hall of residence and having close contact with them during my participant observations, which covered the participants' entire taught Masters study period. These factors enabled me to build rapport and mutual trust with them and to conduct my observations in a less obtrusive style.

*Persistent observation:* My doctoral student identity and hall of residence membership ensured my performance as a full participant in the field on a daily basis in most cases, as well as my proximity with participants, thus facilitated me to conduct the participant observations in a persistent manner.

*Peer debriefing:* I gained peer debriefing by attending various research seminars and formal academic conferences in which I received much constructive feedback from different types of 'peers', such as fellow students, senior students, and senior researchers (e.g., Professor Michael Byram, Professor Fred Dervin, etc.). For example, Professor Byram's advice of keeping reminding myself of the fields of study to which I intended to contribute helped me to conduct this interdisciplinary research in a more focused manner.

### **3.8.2 Transferability, dependability, and confirmability**

In qualitative research, transferability deals with the question of whether the findings of the study can be applied to other settings or contexts; and, if so, to what extent (Bradley, 1993). Dependability refers to 'the coherence of the internal process' and 'the way the researcher accounts for changing conditions in the phenomena' (Bradley, 1993, p. 437). Confirmability relates to whether or not the characteristics of the data are confirmable in the eyes of those examining the results of the study (Bradley, 1993). Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that the evidence of transferability, dependability, and confirmability can be constructed by other researchers as he/she examines the processes and products of the study if relevant thick description, which depicts the context

under study and details of the fieldwork processes, is provided. As shown previously in this chapter, I have provided detailed and comprehensive descriptions of the participants' profiles and the complex layers involved in the data collection and analysis processes of this study. I have also briefly described the research context of my study in Chapter 1 and elaborated in this chapter the relevant contextual issues such as time, the fieldwork locations, the status of the researcher, and relations in the field. Given the information provided in such thick description, other researchers would be able to make decisions regarding the transferability, dependability, and confirmability of this study.

### **Chapter summary**

In this chapter, I first developed a rationale for choosing social constructionism as the theoretical framework and an ethnographic approach as the methodological choice of this study. I then elaborated my data collection and analysis processes, the justifications for my choices, as well as the related issues in these processes. Furthermore, important fieldwork issues have been discussed, including reflexivity, ethical issues, and trustworthiness.

Having provided detailed descriptions and discussions of the ways I performed as an ethnographer in the field and conducted my study, I will now turn to present the findings of this study in the next three chapters, addressing how Chinese students perceived and responded to emotions in their intercultural encounters, as well as the effects of the relevant sociocultural contexts on these processes.

## **Chapter 4 Constructions of emotions in encountering and engaging with the host environment**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter and the following two chapters present the findings of this thesis. Chapters 4 and 5 explore participants' constructions of emotions in their intercultural adjustment to the host environment, which guided or shaped their responses to the emotions (which I investigate further in Chapters 6 and 7). In this and the next chapter, I am aiming specifically to address the first and third research questions of this study:

*RQ1: How do Chinese students in a UK university construct their understandings of emotions in their intercultural adjustment processes in the host environment?*

*RQ3: What are the relevant sociocultural and historical factors that influence the development processes of these constructions?*

According to Planalp (1999), emotional meaning reveals individuals' important concerns (including needs and goals, motivations, and interests) and evolves as they appraise the events or situations they encounter. Thus, examining how sojourners appraise the intercultural events or situations they encounter sheds light on their essential intercultural adjustment concerns regarding 'what must be adjusted to and how adjustment should proceed' (Anderson, 1994, p. 303). In this chapter, I will therefore be focusing on investigating how participants attached emotional meaning to their general intercultural encounters and engagements within the host environment, then move on to explore their construction of emotions in more specific intercultural contexts including task performance and relationship building in the next chapter.

Two key themes regarding participants' understanding of emotions in their encounters and interactions with people in the host context are presented in this chapter: seeking connections with people in the host environment (4.2.1); and valuing approval in interactions with people in the host environment (4.2.2). The chapter ends with conclusions (4.2.3) and a chapter summary.

## **4.2 Constructions of emotions when encountering and interacting with people and the environments in the UK**

As introduced previously, in this section participants' constructions of emotions which reveal their major concerns in their encounters and interactions with the host environment are explored: seeking connections with people in the host environment, and valuing approval in interactions with people in the host environment. In the following subsections I elaborate these constructions in detail.

### **4.2.1 Seeking connections with people in the host environment**

Participants were willing to connect with people in the host context, as their constructions of emotions illustrated various understandings of the value of such connections. In reality, however, their sense of connection with the host people was often inadequate and they talked of the underlying reasons for this phenomenon. These two issues are discussed in detail below.

#### **The value of connecting with host people**

My data analysis suggests that participants were eager to connect with host people firstly because, by communicating with the host people, they could gain various forms of adjustment support regarding the English language, studying, and living in the UK:

和本国人交流可以锻炼口语，多棒啊。(I1)<sup>1</sup>

You can practice spoken English by communicating with the local people, which is fantastic. (I1)

比方说 S (一个英国老师)<sup>2</sup>讲的内容给我感觉就很 supportive……他有涉及到(学术)文化差异……他会尝试站在你的角度，鼓励你尽快融入这个学习环境……让我觉得很轻松那样子。(G1)

For example, I felt what S (a British lecturer) said was very supportive ... He talked about (academic) cultural differences ... He encouraged you to fit in this learning environment as soon as possible by trying to put himself into another's shoes .... It made me feel very relaxed. (G1)

我感觉你对英国人多接触，也会更好的保护自己。……去了解更多的人，知道更多的信息，你可能就会更客观去看(一些事情)，就能更保护自己。(D1)

I feel that the more you interact with the British, the more you are able to protect yourself.... You may be able to (view things) in a more objective way if you get to know more people and more information, hence you will be better able to protect yourself. (D1)

These examples highlight the value of connecting with the local people in supporting participants' integration in the host environment. On the one hand, some authors propose that host communication promotes sojourners' cultural learning process, in terms of providing language and academic help (Bochner et al., 1977) as well as developing their knowledge about and insight into the host environment (Kim, 2005), both of which serve as 'points of reference for a check and validation of their [sojourners'] own behaviours' (Kim, 2005, p. 386). Such arguments are echoed in the above accounts which illustrate the supporting

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis, the code in the bracket presented after an interview quotation (as a combination of a capital letter and a number) gives information regarding who made this account in which round of interview. For example, the code "I1" here suggests that this is the participant I's account in 1<sup>st</sup> round of interview.

<sup>2</sup> The content in the brackets in the interview quotations from participants presented in this thesis is added by the researcher to clarify meaning.



value of host connection, i.e., improving spoken English, gaining access to more information about the host academic and social environment, and strengthening an understanding of the environment. From participants' perspectives, all of these aspects accelerated their cultural learning and adjustment progress in the UK and were therefore desired by them.

On the other hand, some of the quotations above suggest that interacting with host people comes with its own emotional support value: participants either felt 'very relaxed' by acquiring academic support from a British lecturer or felt safer due to her more informed understanding of the host environment based on the informational support provided by interacting with the local people. In previous studies discussions about the value of host communication are mainly focused on its informational support function, yet the above examples illustrate that host communication also helped to release participants' academic adjustment pressure and insecurity evoked by entering into a new environment. Therefore, this finding highlights the significance of the emotional benefits of host communication which seems to be neglected by previous studies.

In addition to gaining adjustment support, many participants also desired to connect with host people and the environment (for example, participating in host cultural events and exchanging cultural knowledge) as a way of experiencing other cultures for its own sake:

每个星期五都跟他们（一群英国学生）去 pub……因为我知道我宅在宿舍也是宅着宿舍，也没看书，还不如多点跟他们聊天。(I1)

I go to pubs with them (a group of British students) every Friday ... Because I know I would do nothing special if stayed in my accommodation, and I wouldn't do any self-study. So it would be better to spend this period of time on interacting with them. (I1)

上次万圣节有好多个 party，当时我就去了一个……因为这也是他们的一种文化，我觉得还是要来感受一下，跟当地的人一样，他们怎么做我们就怎么做。(K1)

I went to one of the Halloween parties last time ... Because this is part of their culture, so I think it would be good to experience it and do what locals do. (K1)

比方说跟 O（一个英国学生），有（关于英国文化的）疑问问他他都会跟你讲，而且他也想从中国人这边学中文。就是互相学习，互相了解文化……还挺有意思的。(G1)

For example, you could ask O (a British student) about any questions (in regard to the UK cultures) and get the answers, and he also wants to learn Chinese language from the Chinese. So we mutually learn and understand each other's cultures ... It's quite interesting. (G1)

The above comments reveal what underpinned participants' eagerness to seek host connections: a sense of curiosity and openness towards the host cultural environment as well as their interest in learning from it. Indeed, developing host connections cannot be achieved without a 'willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness' and a 'readiness to experience ... interaction with another culture' (Byram 1997, p. 50). Moreover, as illustrated in the third example above, the participant viewed *mutual* curiosity and openness to be important when developing host connections. The disadvantage of lacking interest from the host people's side was elaborated by the following comment:

如果（他们对中国文化）不感兴趣，你跟他们聊，对他们来说是一个遥远的话题……（那么跟他们聊中国文化就会变成）真的无趣（的事情）。(C2)

If (they) are not interested (in Chinese culture), then this is an irrelevant topic to them ... (Then talking about Chinese culture with them will become a) quite boring (thing). (C2)

Hence, participants' attempts to build host connections by talking about different cultures can be discouraged by others' indifferent attitudes, thereby highlighting the significance of a form of emotional connection known as 'emotional coincidence' in which 'two people react with similar emotions to the same event' (Planalp, 1999, p. 61). Emotional coincidence regarding curiosity and openness towards other cultures was perceived to be an essential

interpersonal factor for developing a satisfactory sense of connection between participants and host people.

In sum, participants seek out host connections with a view to gaining instrumental help (regarding language and academic issues as well as understanding of the host environment) and emotional support as well as getting opportunities of experiencing and other cultures. The significance of the emotional benefits that emerged from their communication with those in the host communication in terms of easing up academic adjustment stress and insecurity triggered by entering into a new environment, and a mutually curious and open attitude in developing host connections are emphasized.

Reasons for lacking a sense of connection with the host environment and the value of connecting with other Chinese students

Despite the value of connecting with the host people as outlined above, in many occasions participants felt a distinct lack of such connections. They mainly attributed the cause of this lack firstly to the perceived cultural distances (e.g., different cultural backgrounds, lacking in-depth interaction or identifications with the host groups) that emerged when engaging in host communication:

聚餐就会跟一群外国人坐着吗，聊聊天什么的……可能因为就你一个人，他们跟你有不同文化背景，大家就说一些很表面的话……就是一个不一样的人在一堆人里面那种感觉。(K2)

Sometimes I have meals with a group of foreigners. We sit together and chat a bit or something ... We (only) have very superficial interactions, probably because I feel isolated since their cultural backgrounds are different from mine... It feels like I stayed with a group of people who are different from me. (K2)

假如说我主动去参与外国人的活动，我也不会感到很开心，还是会感到孤单……我有很强烈的文化界限感，我跟你们不是一路人，玩不到一块去。(M2)

Even if I take the initiative to participate in foreigners' social activities, I wouldn't have fun and I still feel lonely ... I have a strong sense of cultural boundaries. I'm different from you, so I'm not able to have fun with you. (M2)

It is clear that such perceived cultural distances weakened participants' sense of connection with the host environment, supporting Spencer-Oatey and Xiong's (2006) point that lacking of things in common and clashes regarding cultural values were the main reasons for limited interaction between Chinese students and people from the host culture. Thus, in reality the positive effects of cultural curiosity and a willingness of experiencing other cultures in order to promote host connections (discussed previously) may be outweighed by the negative impact of perceived cultural distance.

Participants' preferences for not building intercultural connections on purpose also influenced their energy investments in this regard:

我如果跟这个人交朋友比较舒服，那我就跟这个人交朋友，也不会在乎你是哪个国家来的。(J2)

If I feel comfortable to make friends with this person, I will. I wouldn't care about which country he/she comes from. (J2)

我不会说只要是个外国人，我就一定要上去怎么怎么……我觉得不要去刻意追求。(C2)

I would not build connections with someone on purpose just because he/she is a foreigner ... I don't think it's necessary to do so. (C2)

Some participants further elaborated their reasons for holding such an attitude. On the one hand, they held the view that the outcome of building connections on purpose may not be that desirable:

比如说那块儿坐了一桌英国人，我想认识他们，目的就是为了跟他们交朋友，就进去跟他们坐，我觉得这个就很尴尬。首先你不认识人家，其次人家都是英国人，你中国人，人家说英语讲得快什么的，你可能也会不理解，最后你是会被冷落的那一个……从跟他们接触上你感受不到什么。(E1)

For example, there's a group of British sitting around a table. I wish to know them for the purpose of making friends with them, so I join them, which I think could be a very embarrassing situation. First, you don't know them. Second, they are all British but you are Chinese, so you might not be able to understand what they are talking about when

they speak fast in English. So you will be the one left out in the end... You will not be able to experience anything by joining them in this way. (E1)

很多中国学生会过分的做一些什么，做的过于热情<sup>3</sup>或干嘛，想通过这个去期待对方的一丝丝 mercy 或者一丝丝热情，我觉得这个不要有。因为你真的不知道多那一分的东西会产生什么样的一个后果，不见得是好的后果。(D2)

Many Chinese students may do things too deliberately, such as being too friendly or something with the hope of getting a little bit of mercy or friendliness from others in return. I don't think this is appropriate. Because you would never know what kind of consequences it may bring to you by behaving too deliberately. The consequences may not be good ones. (D2)

The 'desirable outcome' participants expected in developing intercultural connections included feeling comfortable while communicating, being actively involved in conversations as others are, being accepted and included by others, and so on. Participants believed that such interactions could not be achieved by pursuing connections on purpose.

On the other hand, the aim and time length of participants' stay in the UK also influenced their attitudes towards connecting with the host people. This is because they needed to use their interpersonal energy more economically given their primary aim of studying (rather than socializing) in the UK, as well as the very limited length of their stay (i.e. one year):

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<sup>3</sup> I translate the word “热情” here into “friendly” or “friendliness”, rather than into its English equivalent “enthusiastic” or “enthusiasm”. “热情” in this language context refers to a warm interpersonal manner; however, “enthusiasm” is defined as “a strong feeling of excitement and interest in something and a desire to become involved in it” or “something that you are very interested in and spend a lot of time doing” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016), and thus is an emotion concept centring on doing things rather than on interpersonal issues. Therefore, it would be inappropriate to equate “热情” with “enthusiasm”. The former is in fact better translated as “friendly” or “friendliness”, which is related to a pleasant manner of behaving in interpersonal communication and thus conveys the key meaning of “热情” in this context.

在这边可能我更明确一点我是来干什么的……不会花费很多时间，特意去跟你交往一下。(E1)

Perhaps because I am so certain about why I come here... So I would not spend a lot of time to socialize with you (the non-Chinese) on purpose. (E1)

如果呆很久的话，可能会跟外国人更加用心去相处一些，我呆一年就走了。(M2)

If I stayed in the UK in a longer time period, I might put a bit more efforts on getting along with foreigners, but I only stay here for one year. (M2)

These comments reveal that a person's aims and length of staying abroad may strongly influence his/her motivation for establishing host connections. Kim (2001, p. 110) argues that, compared to permanent settlers such as immigrants, sojourners who anticipate a temporary stay abroad 'may not consider any serious commitment to adaptation'. In several participants' cases, their perseverance in making efforts to connect with the host environment was weakened by setting study as their priority and anticipating returning home within a short period. Therefore, this finding further echoes Ward et al. (2001)'s point that individuals' adjustment outcome can be affected by the reasons for their relocation to another country, as the temporary nature of participants' stay in the UK restricts their energy investment and attempts to connect with the host environment.

Furthermore, the perception of the distant or even cold attitude of host people also affected participants' desire to interact and connect with them. Although there were few relevant comments in the interviews, in my participant observations it was not uncommon to hear participants' complain about some host students' exclusionary attitudes and their unwillingness to communicate with Chinese students, as well as their general impression of the unapproachable character of the host students. It is therefore evident that the perceived low level of host receptivity, i.e. 'the degree to which a given environment is structurally and psychologically accessible and open to strangers'

(Kim, 2005, p. 387), negatively influenced participants' sense of connection with the host environment, at least to some extent.

In addition, many participants perceived that their social network status also had an impact on their attempts to connect with the host culture and people. That is, since the majority of their social network was Chinese, their tendency to avoid building intercultural connections on purpose was further enhanced for different reasons. Some participants felt a lack of motivation to change the status of their existing social network, as mentioned by K:

本来圈子里面全都是中国人……可能已经在这个圈子习惯了，也就不想去改变。(K1)

My social network is full of Chinese ... Perhaps I'm already used to it, so I don't want to make changes any more. (K1)

Anderson (1994) proposes that developing habits is an organic aspect of the intercultural adjustment process, and such development can bring about various effects on sojourners' adjustment. The above account shows that habituation to their existing ingroup network further limited the participant's opportunities of participating fully in the host environment, and is therefore a historical factor which underpinned K's reluctance towards making an effort to build host connections.

For others, they were more concerned about the possibility of being rejected or alienated by their Chinese friends if they chose to join a non-Chinese social group, thereby largely restricting the opportunity of building host connections:

还是分场合的，很多中国人的话我还是会加入中国人，如果全都是老外那就加入老外吧，没有刻意想过说今天我要抛下我的中国伙伴，加入那一桌……身边的朋友圈子限制了我。{就是基本都是中国人是吧？}<sup>4</sup>对。说句不好听，‘你怎么跑到外国人圈子里去了，你这什么意思啊？’{你觉得他们难免会议论这个是吧？}对，真的很难听的。(M2)

It depends on the specific situations. I would join the Chinese group if there are many Chinese around, and I would join foreigners if there are all foreigners around. I never thought about leaving out my Chinese friends and joining the foreigners' group on

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<sup>4</sup> The content in the braces in the interview quotations from participants presented in this thesis refers to the questions raised by the researcher in interviews.

purpose ... I'm restricted by my social network here. {In which Chinese is the majority, right?} Yes. They may even say something like 'How come you stay within the foreigners' groups? What on earth do you want to do?' {So you think they will inevitably gossip about this kind of thing, right?} Yes, and some gossip really makes me feel uneasy. (M2)

This account echoes Brown (2008)'s position that individuals may be afraid of negative evaluation or alienation by their ingroup members if they join the host network, which in turn places pressure on individuals to conform to their ingroup network at the expense of expanding their host social network. Thus, ingroup conformity pressure was viewed as a contextual restriction for participants' freedom in developing host connections.

The effects of other Chinese students on participants' adjustment to the host environment cannot be overemphasized, particularly within this study in which there was a large number of Chinese students (more than 20) living together in the research field. In fact, despite feeling restricted by remaining in the Chinese group, participants also treasured their Chinese connections, especially given their lack of connection with the host environment. They expressed the following understanding of the value of maintaining their Chinese connections:

（我们）互相（可以）有一个陪伴……大家都是群体动物吧，你一个人的话有时候还是会觉得孤独什么的，特别是又在不熟悉的环境，如果大家在一起就会好一些吧。(A1)

(We can) accompany each other... We are all group animals, and sometimes you may feel lonely, especially in an unfamiliar environment. So I feel better when staying together with them. (A1)

中国人太多了，不会感觉特别寂寞，在去除语言情况的影响下是件好事，因为人本身就是群居动物嘛 .....我们的生活是要过得更好，从 happy 的角度还是挺好的，他们会在一定程度上减小你的压力。(L1)

There are so many Chinese around and I don't feel very lonely, which is a good thing except not good for practising spoken English, as human beings are social animals ... We aim at living a better life, so it's a good thing from the perspective of gaining happiness.

They can ease your stress to a certain extent. (L1)



（和中国人一起的）感受就是亲切感，像找到亲人一样，因为是在这么远的地方。（B1）

I feel intimate (when staying with Chinese) as if I were with my family members, because I am in such a far-away place. (B1)

The above comments reflect participants' need to preserve a sense of cultural-emotional connectedness in the UK, which involves 'perceptions of feeling more comfortable, thinking along the same wavelength, and sharing a similar communication style and sense of humour when interacting with peers from the same cultural background' (Volet and Ang, 1998, p. 10). This kind of connectedness was cherished by participants because of its unique value in minimising loneliness, adjustment stress, and creating a 'home' feeling in the UK. In other words, connecting with Chinese students provides participants with important peer support which helps to reduce their feelings of 'loss regarding friends and family, social status, and possessions' (Chen and Starosta, 2005, p. 165-166), as well as their environmental uncertainty and insecurity in the UK as illustrated previously. Connecting with Chinese students was therefore viewed as an essential facilitator for enhancing participants' emotional well-being as they adjusted to the host environment.

In this subsection, I initially outlined participants' understanding of the value of building host connections, which includes gaining adjustment support with cultural learning (regarding language, academic cultures, and the general host environment) and emotional benefits, as well as an opportunity to experience other cultures. The emotional support value of host communication, such as releasing participants' academic adjustment stress and sense of insecurity towards the host environment, seems to be neglected in previous studies. The findings also show that host connections based on communicating cultural knowledge cannot be fully developed without mutual curiosity and open attitudes. I then explored the reasons that underpin participants' inadequate sense of connection with the host environment: perceived cultural distances; the attitude of not building intercultural connections on purpose for the sake of

ideal communicative effects (such as feeling comfortable in the communication, being included and accepted by others in host interactions) which was further strengthened by participants' priority given to their study and the limited length of their stay in the UK; perceived low levels of host receptivity; and the impact of the large surrounding Chinese group (i.e. habituation with the Chinese network, the fear of being alienated by the Chinese group, and the temptation to stay within the Chinese group for emotional comfort). Closely related to the last reason is the perceived value of connecting with other Chinese students: gaining a cultural-emotional connectedness to enhance emotional well-being in the host context.

In addition to their pursuing a connection with people and the environment of the host context, participants also valued a sense of approval in their interactions with the host environment, which will be explored in the following subsection.

#### **4.2.2 Valuing approval in interactions with people in the host environment**

Another important intercultural adjustment concern of participants, revealed by their constructions of emotions in interacting with the host environment, was achieving a sense of approval underpinned by an accepting attitude in both social and academic contexts. The following paragraphs elaborate their understanding of approval in these two contexts respectively.

In the social context, participants emphasized the importance of treating people equally, irrespective of their cultural backgrounds, as well as respecting diversity regarding beliefs and ways of life in intercultural communication:

我们路过一个公交车站，外国人就在那 fucking Chinese 这样，我们刚走过他们就这样说，就是对着我们说的……所以我觉得有很多人他还是不友好，他不欢迎你……就是很生气。(E1)

We walked past a bus stop where a group of foreigner shouted 'fucking Chinese'. I'm sure they shouted this to us, as they did so when we just walked past them... So I feel there are still lots of unfriendly people around and we are not welcome here... I felt very angry. (E1)

他（一个英国学生）不信基督教，但他没有把他对基督教的不信任表达出来，就是很客观地给你讲解基督教怎么怎么样，不把他的思想强加于别人……我觉得是一种很尊重的态度。(B1)

He (a British student) was not a Christian, but he didn't display his disbelief about Christianity. He just explained what Christianity was about to us in a very objective style, and he didn't impose his ideas on others ... I think this is a very respectful attitude. (B1)

有一次（聚会）玩得也挺晚的……我们就想回去，他们（一群外国学生）就死活不让我们走，说什么接着玩啊，不要扫兴……觉得有一点讨厌，因为他们在勉强你做你不想做的事情。(H2)

Once we stayed up very late at night (at a party) ... and we wanted to go back home. They (a group of non-Chinese students) didn't let us leave, and said something like 'Stay here. Don't be party poopers.' ... I felt a bit annoyed, as they forced you to do things you don't want to do. (H2)

Some authors (e.g., Deardorff, 2006; Gudykunst, 2005) propose that valuing cultural diversities is a fundamental proposition in promoting competent intercultural communication. Indeed, such an attitude made participants feel respected (as shown in the second quotation above). In situations in which such an attitude was absent, participants felt they were either 'being rejected by ... the host nationals' (Chen and Starosta, 2005, p. 165-166) or being 'pushed' by others, which may hamper the development of healthy intercultural communication based on a mutually inclusive, understanding, and respectful stance.

In the academic context, participants' desire for approval was mainly focused on being accepted by the academic staff. Some of them shared their stories of encountering disapproval from academic staff, which made them feel insecure, stressed, and hurt:

他（导师）说我的东西是 rubbish，说我过不了，“我非常怀疑你的学术能力” “你英语水平怎么会这样” ……我对我未来的不确定感，我能不能继续走下去……这一次他对我这样子，以后会不会……{会不会一直这样，是吧？}对。(C2)

He (the supervisor) said my stuff was rubbish and I would fail. He said: 'I am very doubtful about your academic ability' and 'How come your English language level is like this'...I felt uncertain about my future as well as if I could carry on like this... He treated me in this way this time, so in the future will he...? {Will he always behave in this way, right?} Yes. (C2)

我那时候语言的时候 essay，因为打印机的问题迟交了。我那时候就不敢去上课，因为知道我们那个老师有点暴躁。我去到那里拿给他的时候，跟他说 I know I'm late，他就还是那种很不理解的，就 Yes you are，然后拿过我的 essay 用红色笔在我的 essay 封面写上大大的 late。我那时候就哭了……太 terrible 了。他真的是当着全班同学的面，就随便拿着我的 paper 就……有种抢过来的，就写个 late 那样……那段时间读语言读得特别不开心。(G1)

I did not submit my pre-sessional essay on time because the printer was out of order. I dared not to go to class as I knew that the teacher was bad-tempered. I said 'I know I'm late' when submitting the essay to him. He still did not respond in an empathetic way, and said 'Yes you are'; then he used a red pen to write a big 'late' on the cover of my essay. I cried at that point... It was so terrible. He almost seized my paper and then wrote 'late' on it in front of all my classmates ... I felt very unhappy when reading my pre-sessional programme. (G1)

The accounts above confirm the points raised in Robertson et al.'s (2000) study regarding 'an overwhelming desire by [international] students to be accepted by ... staff' (Robertson et al., 2000, p. 100) and to integrate into the host academic environment, as well as the lack of an empathetic attitude from many members of staff. Clearly, participants' strong emotions in these examples are a sign of their eagerness to 'fit in' and gain staff's empathy. Staff's disapproval, however, was detrimental to their learning confidence and satisfaction, which added additional emotional burdens to their academic adjustment process. Such burdens were evident when I noticed that C kept

seeking advice from different students after the problematic encounter with her supervisor for quite a few days, and when there were tears in G's eyes when she told me the 'late submission' story in our interview. Thus, these examples support Robertson et al.'s (2000) call for joint efforts from staff and international students towards attaining effective staff-student communication and the achievement of 'a mutually desirable outcome' (Robertson et al., 2000, p.101). C's story above illustrates the important role academic staff play in showing acceptance and empathy towards their students in the face of the difficulties the academic environment imposes upon them, in particular, Chinese (and perhaps other international) students.

In this subsection, I have elaborated participants' construction of a sense of approval in their interactions with the host environment in both social and academic contexts. A sense of approval in the social context refers to the act of valuing cultural diversities by treating people equally, as well as respecting different beliefs and lifestyles, which is crucial to the promotion of inclusive, understanding, and respectful relationships between participants and host people. In the academic context, a sense of approval characterized by academic staff's accepting and empathetic attitude was treasured, as staff-student interactions without such approval can threaten participants' learning confidence and satisfaction, thereby may hamper their academic adjustment process. Staff and students need to work together to ensure the desirable learning and adjustment outcomes are achieved from both sides, and students' assertiveness in terms of explicitly displaying their desire for academic success and staff's approval may also promote the occurrence of such a working together process.

#### **4.2.3 Conclusions**

By investigating participants' constructions of emotions as they interacted with people in the host environment, I have presented their essential adjustment concerns in this regard: seeking connections with people in the host

environment, and valuing approval in interactions with people in the host environment.

Participants' adjustment concerns regarding host communication signify that, in addition to its widely-discussed cultural learning function, host communication also played an emotional support role (e.g., reducing academic adjustment stress and environmental insecurity in the host context), thus highlighting the significance of the emotional benefits of host communication, which is under-explored in previous studies (e.g., Bochner et al., 1977; Kim, 2005; Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006).

The findings also suggest that participants' desire for host connections had an instrumental focus (in terms of improving spoken English, gaining access to more information about the host academic and social environment, and strengthening an understanding of the environment) and that they also displayed a strong willingness to maintain close contact with other Chinese students. Rather than assimilating themselves to the demands of the host environment, participants seemed to prefer a more integrationist connection style, as Ward et al. (2001, p. 112) write, 'they have strong preferences for retaining their cultural identities while sustaining good relationships with members of the dominant culture'. The findings therefore highlight the restrictiveness of an assimilationist view towards intercultural adjustment which seems prevalent in the existing literature, as it cannot fully interpret participants' integrationist adjustment preferences. Such adjustment preferences, however, were less easily implemented in reality due to a variety of cultural (e.g. perceived cultural distances), personal (e.g. habituation with existing social network, the need to preserve emotional well-being), interpersonal (e.g. perceived indifference from host people towards communicating cultural knowledge) and contextual (e.g. perceived low level of host receptivity, conformity pressure from the Chinese group) restrictions as outlined above, which led to participants' inadequate sense of connection with the host society.

Moreover, participants' understanding of emotions also shed light on the complex effects of the large proportion of Chinese students on their affective intercultural adjustment experiences. On the one hand, participants felt restricted and even disturbed (e.g., by some ingroup members' gossip) by the Chinese group which limited their opportunities and freedom to participate fully in host communication; on the other hand, they also enjoyed staying within the Chinese group due to its unique benefits of boosting emotional well-being in their adjustment journey (in terms of minimising loneliness, adjustment stress, and creating a 'home' feeling in the UK). Hence, instead of viewing the large number of Chinese students merely as a disadvantage to their intercultural experiences as proposed in Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006)'s study, participants appeared to drift with the push and pull of emotional events brought about by engaging with their Chinese network. Furthermore, the findings suggest that participants' close contact with other Chinese students and lack of host connection was their own choice after balancing their competing emotional needs regarding connecting with various people in the host environment, thus highlights the significance of emotions in guiding participants' adjustment orientations.

In addition, the findings highlights the important role academic staff play in showing acceptance and empathy towards their students in the face of the difficulties the academic environment imposes upon them, and calls for the joint efforts from all parties in the university to create an emotionally supportive academic environment to facilitate participants' academic adjustment.

## **Chapter summary**

The aim of this chapter is to explore how Chinese students construct their understanding of emotions in their interactions with the host environment in order to inform their intercultural adjustment concerns in their general

engagements with the host people and cultures and the relevant conditional factors that influenced this construction process. The findings show that participants were eager to connect with people and the environments in the UK, and valued being approved of in both social and academic interactional contexts.

Participants pursued host connections that provided valuable instrumental and emotional support in their adjustment to the host environment, as well as opportunities to experience and learn from the host cultures. A mutually curious and open attitude was perceived as an important conditional factor for developing satisfactory host connections based on communicating cultural knowledge. Participants attributed their limited host connections to a perceived cultural distance, an attitude of not building intercultural connections on purpose, perceived low host receptivity, and the restrictive effects of their Chinese network. Their study aims and limited length of stay in the UK reinforced their tendency to avoid developing host connections on purpose. Despite feeling restricted by the Chinese group, participants valued preserving a cultural-emotional connectedness with their Chinese peers.

Participants sought approval in terms of treating others equally and accepting various beliefs and ways of life to ensure the establishment of inclusive, understanding, and respectful intercultural relations. Moreover, academic staff's approval, underpinned by accepting and empathetic attitudes, was deemed crucial for participants' learning confidence and satisfaction, as well as a desirable learning and academic adjustment outcome.

These findings emphasize on the importance of the emotional benefits of host communication in terms of reducing participants' academic adjustment pressure and host environment insecurity, a point largely neglected by previous studies. They also demonstrate participants' integrationist preference to connect with the host environment, which reveals the inadequacy of the assimilationist approach prevalent in extant intercultural adjustment literature in understanding participants' adjustment orientation. Moreover, the data



sheds lights on the restrictive effects of a variety of cultural, personal, interpersonal and contextual factors have on the participants' integrative efforts to connect with the host environment and therefore emphasise the importance of paying attention to these conditional factors in order to yield a more holistic understanding of sojourners' intercultural adjustment experience. In addition, the findings reveal a complex picture of the roles Chinese groups played in participants' adjustment processes, in which the Chinese group acted as both an obstacle that hampered participants' full participation in the host society and as a facilitator that promoted their emotional well-being in their international sojourns. Finally, the significance of co-constructing a more emotionally supportive university environment between university staff and international students is raised.

In the next chapter, I will investigate participants' constructions of emotions as they performed communicative tasks and developed interpersonal intercultural relationships in the host environment in order to reveal their main adjustment concerns in these two intercultural contexts.

## **Chapter 5 Constructions of emotions in task performance and interpersonal relationship development**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In Chapter 4, I have presented the participants' constructions of emotions in their general intercultural encounters and engagement within the host environment. In this chapter, I continue my investigation of the participants' constructions of emotions in two more specific intercultural contexts: task performance and interpersonal relationship development. As in Chapter 4, this chapter also aims to answer the first and third research questions identified in Chapter 2:

*RQ1: How do Chinese students in a UK university construct their understandings of emotions in their intercultural adjustment processes in the host environment?*

*RQ3: What are the relevant sociocultural and historical factors that influence the development processes of these constructions?*

In 5.2, the participants' major adjustment concerns revealed by their understanding of emotions in task performance are outlined, which are: pursuing competence when performing academic and social tasks, and promoting a positive image of themselves in classroom discussions. Section 5.3 provides a picture of the emotional meaning the participants attached to their interpersonal intercultural relationship development processes: seeking intimacy in friendships and valuing sincerity in interpersonal relationships.

### **5.2 Constructions of emotions in performing academic and social tasks**

As stated in the introduction of this chapter, the participants strived for competence in academic and social task performance as well as creating a

positive self-presentation in classroom discussions. These are elaborated as follows.

### **5.2.1 Pursuing competence in academic and social task performance**

As suggested by my data, from the time of their arrival in the UK, the participants often experienced ambiguity and uncertainty regarding performing academic and social tasks in this environment. For example, some of them felt confused about the classroom behaviour of some host students, which violated their expectations of the role of a student or discussion group member:

我们上课小组讨论，完了之后每个人都发言，都得出自己的结果。那个女的第一个上去发言，她把我们所有人的东西都讲了，给人感觉这些东西都是我一个人讲的……但是我不知道是不是所有英国人都是这样，或者他们不在意，中国人自己在意而已。……总给人感觉 confuse 了。(C1)

We had a group discussion in the class. Everyone needed to present his/her own understanding after the discussion. This particular woman presented first. She presented all the points we discussed and left others with the impression that these were all her personal ideas... But I've no idea if all the British are like this, or if this is something only the Chinese would mind... This confuses me. (C1)

Such an uncertainty about communicative tasks also evolved in the host social environment, and participants found it difficult to understand host people's meanings or found the appropriate language manners in the host culture difficult to grasp:

有时候请求外国人帮助的时候，如果语言存在障碍的话不知道什么意思，有些外国人表达可能很含蓄……我搞不清楚到底是帮我还是不帮我。(M2)

Sometimes, I can't catch foreigners' meanings when seeking help from them because of the language barrier. The meanings of some foreigners' expressions may be very implicit ... So I'm not sure if they want to help me or not. (M2)

在饭堂打饭的时候中国人就很简单地说 **this one**，或者一个菜名加一个 **please**。如果是外国人，他们很容易说 **Could I have……?** 可能这是他们习惯的一种说法吧，因为语言的问题，我们觉得没有那么习惯去说。(A1)

When Chinese are in the canteen, they simply say 'this one' or the name of the dish followed by a 'please' as they order meals. For foreigners, they say 'Could I have ...?' effortlessly. Maybe this is their language manners, and we are not so used to such expressions because of language issues. (A1)

The above examples demonstrate one of the major intercultural adjustment challenges confronted by participants when performing academic and social tasks in the host context: they lacked 'understanding of the bases of the interaction' or did not master 'the intricacies of these [intercultural communication] processes (Ward et al., 2001, p69), which are evidenced by their limited awareness of the appropriate group discussion behaviour, insufficient grasp of the English language, and not being accustomed to the host language manners.

Such perceived ambiguity and unfamiliarity left participants with a sense of inadequacy when dealing with the demands of the host environment. For instance, they perceived difficulties in making themselves understood in daily interactions, in reaching a common point and convincing others in group discussions, etc. which made them feel anxious and stressed:

有的时候词不达意，你着急，他也着急。(JSX2)

Sometimes I can't find the correct words to express myself, which makes both myself and others anxious. (C2)

（我感到）焦虑，觉得很难和他们（外国组员）达成共识，而且他（一个外国组员）总是说服你去相信他，我觉得压力蛮大的。我觉得可以保留自己的想法，但确实形势上来说是控制不了他的……他语言上可能还是要强一些，我觉得语言上还是有一定关系。(H1)

(I felt) anxious, as it was so difficult to reach a common point with them (non-Chinese group members). He (a non-Chinese group member) kept on trying to convince me to

accept his ideas, which made me feel stressed. I felt that I could retain my own opinions, but I was indeed not able to control his behaviour.... Perhaps his language ability was better. I felt language still mattered. (H1)

It can be seen from the above that limited English proficiency and debating skills led to the participants' feelings of inadequacy in achieving their communicative goals effectively, which in turn led to their 'impotence for being unable to cope with aspects of, or tasks in, the new environment' (Chen and Starosta, 2005, p. 166) and thus highlighted the imperative of making adjustment efforts.

Such an imperative seemed particularly prominent in the participants' experiences of managing their academic progress for the purpose of passing academic assessments as many of them appeared under great pressure in this regard. This was especially the case when the deadlines of submitting their academic assignments were fast-approaching, as their daily conversations at those points were often focused on the difficulties and stress of accomplishing assignments to a high standard within limited time periods. Their interview accounts, on the other hand, reveal that certain conditional factors further reinforced such academic stress, including previous unsuccessful academic experiences (either the participants' own or those of others) and their perceptions of the pressure from the academic staff who were in charge of their study programmes or who marked their assignments:

假如说我没有挂了的话我不会像现在这样，压力这么大，这么恐慌的。我怕我又挂一科……这种经历潜意识会一直笼罩着我。(M2)

If I hadn't already failed an assignment, I would not panic and be so stressed. I'm afraid that I will fail again... I am always haunted by this past experience unconsciously. (M2)

我听说我们上一届有一个学姐她毕业论文没有过，她到现在还在写论文。我就怕我成为一个论文没有过挂掉了。所以我觉得就是我还是要把那个学习，最起码要过，我想首先你把学习弄明白了你再做其他的事情。(E1)

I've heard that last year, a student failed her dissertation, and she is still rewriting her dissertation now. I'm concerned that I will face the same situation. So I think I still need to put learning as my main priority; at least I need to pass. So I just think that I need to get the learning stuff organized first before doing other things. (E1)

我觉得这个其实跟老师的处理方式很大影响……他的处理方式给我们的感觉就是特别大的压力。(G1)

The way this teacher dealt with things had a massive impact... which made us feel very stressed. (G1)

烦的就是我的导师比别的导师都严，他的标准更高。……就怕过不了。(E2)

I'm worried because my supervisor is stricter than any of the other ones, as he has a higher standard... I'm concerned about not being able to pass. (E2)

Hence, the development process of the participants' strong desire for managing their academic progress effectively cannot be holistically understood without reference to the impacts of relevant historical (e.g., previous learning experiences) and interpersonal (e.g., pressure from others) factors.

Moreover, the participants' primary concern about academic assessments over and above other issues as revealed by their intense academic stress suggests the selectivity in their adjustment orientations. That is, their main aim of studying in the UK directed most of their emotional energy towards passing academic assessments during their adjustment journey. Thus, this finding echoes a similar one in Turner's (2006) study about Chinese international students in the UK that achieving instrumental accommodation (i.e., securing the taught masters degree) was one of Chinese students' central adjustment concerns. It further supports Kim's (2005, p. 382) argument that a sojourner 'tends to be more ready or willing to embrace those host cultural elements that serve his or her own needs' and that intercultural adjustment is selective rather than random.

The participants' insufficient grasp of the intricacies of communicating with the host people also undermined their ease in engaging in intercultural communication. As illustrated below, they felt afraid of, uncertain and insecure about host communication situations such as responding to a host sales assistant's greetings, participating in host social events, etc.:

刚来的时候, 我很怕跟陌生人聊天, 特别是去逛店里的时候, 人家外国人会主动 'Can I help you?' 然后我一般 'No, no, no!', 一般是这样反应, 就怕应付不来。(C2)

I was very afraid to chat with strangers when I just arrived here, especially when doing shopping. The foreign sales assistants often took the initiative and asked 'Can I help you?' And I often replied 'No, no, no!' I often responded like this, as I was concerned about not being able to handle such situations effectively. (C2)

我不太参加学校的社交晚宴 …… (因为) 我没有安全感嘛, 没有用这种社交方式去认识新朋友的习惯, 不确定这个事情好不好玩, 或者我认识这些人会不会和他们很合得来。(H1)

I seldom go to the formal dinners in the university ... (because) I don't have a sense of security as I'm not used to this kind of social event for meeting new people. I'm not sure if it's interesting or not, or if I will get along with these people well. (H1)

The above examples illustrate the effects of intercultural communication apprehension, i.e. 'the fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with people from different groups, especially cultural and/or ethnic groups' (Neuliep and McCroskey, 1997, p. 148), on participants' withdrawal tendency in their host encounters. Specifically, they were concerned about not being able to handle the interactional situations effectively, or were uncertain about what would occur in such interactional situations. Thus, these accounts further echo Neuliep's (2012) point that people who are high in intercultural communication apprehension tend to avoid intercultural interactions.

It is noticeable that certain interpersonal and situational factors, such as others' attitudes and the presence of one's ingroup members, influenced the

participants' intercultural communication apprehension in their host encounters. The following two examples indicated that others' positive attitudes towards the participants helped them to feel more relaxed and brave in speaking up in intercultural interactions:

首先他对你很友好，友好的态度可以使你一下子很放松。(B2)

First of all, he's very friendly to you, which makes you feel very relaxed immediately. (B2)

(我)敢说了就觉得……我觉得他们可以给我比较 nice 的反应，我也就不害怕。(C2)

(I) dared to speak up more... I think they responded to me in a nice way, which made me not feel afraid. (C2)

Relaxation, triggered by others' friendly and kind attitudes as illustrated above, may be the effect of emotional contagion, i.e. individuals 'tend to mimic the facial expressions, vocal expressions, postures, and instrumental behaviors of people around them, and thereby to "catch" others' emotions as a consequence of such facial, vocal, and postural feedback' (Hatfield et al., 1993, p. 96). Hence, it seems that perceived positive attitudes and emotional reactions of others is an important interpersonal factor in developing participants' relaxation in intercultural encounters, as it helped to put them at ease and encouraged them to engage more in interactions.

Participants also held the view that they would feel more relaxed if those who they perceived as more familiar were present in intercultural encounters, especially their Chinese classmates and friends:

可能是因为有(中国)同学(跟我)在一起(和外国人交流)，大家一起有个伴那样，情绪也会好一点。(A2)

Probably because there were other (Chinese) students with me in the interactional situation (with foreigners), I felt that I was accompanied by others, which made me feel better. (A2)

如果我和一个中国女孩，我们两个一块跟他们(一群英国男生)出去玩，可能会好一点……不会那么紧张……我感觉(和中国女孩)我们会互相更了解，然后说什么话



呀……另外一个人（可以）support 的感觉，就帮着打圆场……我觉得跟着中国女孩会默契一些……关于什么事情我俩还可以商量一下，同样的背景和价值观下去讨论就会好一点。(D2)

I may feel a bit better if there were a Chinese girl who accompanied me when I hung out with them (a group of British guys)... I wouldn't feel that nervous (if a Chinese girl was present) ... I feel mutual understanding would become easier (between me and the Chinese girl). Also when interacting with those British guys... one (could) support the other one in terms of smoothing things out (when difficulties in interactions occurred) ... I feel that there would be more tacit understanding between me and a Chinese girl... We could also have a few discussions about issues raised in interactions, which would be easier given the similar background and value orientations that we two would share. (D2)

The above examples support Gudykunst's (2005) argument that one tends to be more relaxed if his/her ingroup members are present. As suggested in the second example, the value of the presence of Chinese peers lies in enhancing understanding and providing mutual support to improve participants' performance (in terms of coping with the interactional issues better) due to shared cultural background and communicative styles. Hence, the presence of ingroup members may have positive effects on participants' being able to relax in their host encounters.

So far, I have outlined and discussed the participants' constructions of emotions when performing academic and social tasks in this subsection, which illustrate their primary concern of pursuing competence in their task performance, e.g., effectiveness in handling tasks (especially in terms of controlling academic progress effectively in order to pass academic assessments), and low intercultural communication apprehension. The participants' particular concern about passing academic assessments and their intense academic stress indicate their selective adjustment orientation with the view of fulfilling their specific needs and goals of studying abroad. Conditional factors, such as previous unsuccessful learning experiences and the perceived pressure from relevant academic staff, reinforced participants' stress about

academic assessments. Similarly, participants' intercultural communication apprehension was eased to a certain extent where they met with others' friendly and kind attitudes as well as the presence of ingroup members in the interactional situations.

In addition to pursuing competence in task performance in their host encounters, the participants also cared about presenting a positive image of themselves in the classroom discussions context, which will be explored in the following subsection.

### **5.2.2 Creating a positive self-presentation in classroom discussions**

The participants also paid special attention to their self-presentation in the context of classroom discussions. In particular, they were made nervous by the anticipation of others' negative evaluation of their spoken English, quality of classroom contributions, and their behaviour of making spontaneous contributions:

中国同学一般都不怎么说话。我觉得可能是怕自己英语出错，我觉得是很重要的原因。

(C1)

Normally Chinese students do not speak a lot in the class. I think perhaps it is because of their concern about making English language mistakes, which I feel is a very important reason. (C1)

我觉得一时半会还是改不过来的……在意旁边跟你同样文化背景的人怎么去想你的这个回答。(M1)

I think it's difficult to make a change in the short term... I care about how those who have the same cultural background might view your answers. (M1)

如果你比较多的讲，可能还是会有一些顾虑，（因为）people would talk。(D1)

Perhaps you would still feel a bit concerned if you spoke a lot in the class, (because) people would talk (about you). (D1)

The participants' anxiety regarding others' negative comments about them as illustrated above reflects the idea of an important concept of the Chinese culture, *Mianzi* (面子; face), which 'refers to an individual's claimed sense of positive image in a relational and network context' (Ting-Toomey, 1985, 1988, cited in Gao and Ting-Toomey, 1998, p. 53). It is clear from the above that concern about the potential loss of their *Mianzi* greatly reduced the participants' motivation in participating in classroom discussions freely and fully.

Moreover, the participants conveyed their understanding of the essential effects of previous learning and growing up experiences in China on their anxiety about losing *Mianzi* in classroom discussions:

在国内的时候这就很常见了，老师问个什么问题都是鸦雀无声，没人敢说……在想，我要不要说阿，好不好啊，说错了怎么办呢，好丢脸阿，就这个观念……在这一方面，外国人总比中国人自信很多。他们从小学校的文化，父母对他们的培养，都是积极教育……从来都是鼓励。(M1)

It is common in China: no one dares to answer the teacher's questions. Students wonder if I should answer it, if it's good to answer it, what if I made a mistake, what if I lost my face...? Just think in this way. In this respect, foreigners are much more confident than the Chinese. They get positive education from childhood from schools and parents... They always get encouragement. (M1)

在国内，我本身是一个很爱说的人，但是我说了之后同学会觉得这是一个很爱显摆的人，我可能会在人际交往上出问题。再就有的老师他会觉得你讲的很 ridiculous，他会打压你。这都会影响到我说的这种（愿望）。(D1)

I am a talkative person, but my classmates would have felt that I was a person who likes showing off and I therefore could have come up against interpersonal problems in China. Also, some teachers may discourage your opinions if they feel what you say is ridiculous. All of these would affect (my desire of speaking up in the class). (D1)

These comments reveal that the participants' action tendencies in intercultural encounters can be largely influenced by their previous socialization which occurred beyond the host contexts. Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue

that an individual acquires his/her assumptions about the world, values, beliefs and behaviours during his/her primary and secondary socialization which take place respectively in one's family and in the society beyond one's home - especially in schools. As illustrated above, the participants' concern about preserving *Mianzi* in classroom discussions was the product of their secondary socialization received in Chinese schools, which continued to have strong effects on their classroom discussion performance in the UK university context.

The effects of preserving *Mianzi* on restricting the participants' engagements with the classroom discussions also suggest that intercultural adjustment does not only involve learning about and internalizing the host culture's ways, but also suspending (at least temporarily) ones' habitual behaviour and attitudes acquired in their previous socialization (Kim, 2005). In this regard, the participants demonstrated changes to differing degrees in their habitually reserved attitude towards classroom discussions as time passed and as they immersed themselves in the host academic environment more. For some of them, their willingness to participate in classroom interactions was gradually enhanced by the encouraging attitude of the lecturers. As noted by B:

这边老师就很鼓励（课堂提问），然后你问的时候老师也会很认真的帮你解答。这种很耐心的态度就会让我更想课堂上问。(B1)

Teachers here encourage (asking questions in class) very much, and when you ask them questions they answer them very seriously. Such a very patient attitude makes me more willing to raise questions in class. (B1)

Such a position was echoed in J's account. Moreover, she and D emphasized the positive effects of other peer students' responses and performance on boosting their own confidence in making contributions in classroom discussions:

我后来会觉得其实也没有必要对自己没有自信……就比如我提好问题（得到回答）后发现大家的反应也都是快点在那边记……这就说明大家其实在这个问题上都是不懂的。(J2)

Later, I gradually realized that there was no need to lack self-confidence ... For example, I found out that everyone was busy taking notes after I raised a question (and got the answer) ... This told me that others had not understood the question I raised either. (J2)

后来我发现我……也是（在上课发言时）有什么就说什么。是那些外国同学积极的表现给我的影响。(D1)

Later I discovered that I ... also spoke freely (in classroom discussions). Those foreign classmates' active classroom performance influenced me. (D1)

However, the effects of peers' classroom performance were not always that positive. For instance, A did not experience a prominent change in her lack of participation to the classroom discussions as she perceived that the overall atmosphere of classroom discussion was not very active, which in turn influenced her own performance:

可能是因为适应了。因为中国人比较多，上课的时候大家都不是很积极参与那种，慢慢地觉得就是这样了……就是整体（课堂）环境的原因。(A2)

Probably because I have been used to (such a style). Because there's a large proportion of Chinese who are not very actively involved in class, which gradually makes me feel that things are just like that ... The overall (class) environment has influenced me. (A2)

Thus, the participants displayed diverse adjustment orientations regarding their participation to classroom discussions, which were co-constructed between themselves, lecturers and other peer students whose encouraging or discouraging attitudes had implications for shaping the participants' attitudes towards classroom discussions.

In this subsection, I have investigated the participants' concern about preserving face in their classroom discussion experiences, which was triggered by their anxiety about others' negative comments regarding their discussion performance. Such a concern largely restricted participants' participation to the classroom discussions and was viewed as the product of their secondary socialization in Chinese schools. Some participants managed to make a change with the help of the encouraging messages they got from interacting with

lecturers and other peer students. However, in some other participants' cases, their reluctance to participate in classroom discussions persisted due to the overall inactive classroom atmosphere.

### **5.2.3 Conclusions**

A detailed exploration of participants' constructions of emotions in the task performance context is provided in this section, which were about pursuing competence in academic and social task performance as well as creating a positive self-presentation in classroom discussions. These constructions shed light on participants' adjustment orientations in their task performance.

As suggested by the findings, the participants found that the aim of performing academic and social tasks in a competent manner was not an easy job, as their constructions of emotions indicated their lack of understanding or mastery of the host communication process, which also reinforced their apprehension towards engaging in intercultural communication. All of these issues raised challenges to their integration into the host environment and therefore called for the necessity of making adjustment efforts.

However, compared to other adjustment demands, the participants' desire to pass academic assessments seemed stronger, as evidenced by their intense academic stress towards their assessment outcomes. This demonstrates the instrumental focus of participants' adjustment orientations (i.e., obtaining the taught masters degree), which further suggests the importance of sojourners' own needs in directing their adjustment orientations. Thus, intercultural adjustment is a process that 'individuals both give to and take from their environments' (Anderson, 1994, p. 301) and individual agency (in terms of the sojourners' own needs and commitment) plays a crucial role in the participants' intercultural adjustment processes.

Also, the fact that some participants confronted the difficulties of overcoming the emotional barrier of preserving face in classroom discussions exemplifies the complexity of intercultural adjustment. That is, learning about the host

academic culture's ways in itself does not guarantee satisfied adjustment outcomes as the participants' previous acquired values and beliefs might get in the way of their adjustment processes. The findings here illustrate that intercultural adjustment raises the need to suspend ones' habitual attitudes shaped in ones' previous socialization and is therefore a highly demanding process.

Furthermore, the findings also highlight the important effects of a variety of factors: interpersonal (e.g., relevant academic staff's strict or encouraging attitudes, others' friendliness and kindness), situational (e.g. the presence of one's ingroup members, lacking an interactive atmosphere in classroom discussions) and historical (e.g. previous learning experiences and socialization). These factors influence participants' constructions of their academic stress, intercultural apprehension and a concern about losing face, which indicate the dynamics of participants' understanding of emotions which evolves during their constant interactions with relevant sociocultural and historical contexts. Thus, it is important to pay close attention to such dynamics in order to understand participants' affective intercultural experiences and adjustment concerns.

Having explored the emotional meanings the participants attached to their academic and social task performance experiences, in the next section I move on to investigate their constructions of emotions in the interpersonal intercultural relationships context.

### **5.3 Constructions of emotions in developing intercultural relationships**

In this section, I outline how the participants constructed their understanding of emotions as they developed their intercultural relationships in order to reveal their needs and value orientations in such relationships. Two emerging themes clustered around intimacy in their intercultural friendships, and

sincerity which participants considered to be the basis of 'good' interpersonal intercultural relationships.

### **5.3.1 Seeking intimacy in intercultural friendships**

The participants tended to seek a sense of intimacy when developing their intercultural friendships. From their perspective, intimacy in intercultural friendships was mainly signified in self-disclosure in terms of openly sharing thoughts, feelings and personal experiences with each other:

最开始会觉得有隔阂，现在可能交往就更加有话直说，或者有什么内心的东西就会分享。所以亲密就会在这上面体现出来……现在和你关系好的外国人会发展到，我们要一起干什么，一起出去玩，没事干的时候就是坐着大家聊天。(F2)

At the beginning I felt there was a gulf between us. Now we are more direct, and we share personal ideas and feelings when we talk with each other. This reflects the intimacy between us. ... Now I plan things with my close foreign friends together and we hang out together. When there are no special things to do, we just sit down and chat with each other. (F2)

她（一个英国学生）会跟我讲很多她比较隐私的事情了。我以前觉得好像跟外国人总有一种……说不清……{隔着一层是吧？}隔着一层。但是你慢慢地努力地去接近他们，也可以打破这种感觉。(C2)

She (a British student) talks about lots of her private things with me now. I used to feel that when staying with foreigners, there's always a ... I don't know... {A gulf, right?} A gulf between us. But this feeling can be lessened as you make efforts to gradually approach them. (C2)

我感到迷惑不确定是因为不知道人家（一个英国学生）对我是个什么看法……比如说她会经常来邀请我参加一些场合，但是有些场合会根本把我忽略，但是会邀请其他中国人。所以我会觉得，她有没有真正把我当成朋友？(E2)

I feel confused and uncertain as I've no idea about how she (a British student) views me ... She often invites me to attend some activities, but in other situations she invites other



Chinese students while neglecting me completely. So I wonder if she really treats me as a friend. (E2)

Altman and Taylor (1973, cited in Chen and Starosta, 2005) argue that what individuals choose to disclose to others influences the relational depth of their interpersonal relationships, and an interpersonal relationship gradually moves from a superficial one to an intimate one as the breadth and depth of individuals' self-disclosure progresses. This seems to be the case in the first and second examples shown above, as the participants perceived more intimate connections because of the increasing extent of sharing private information and frequency of making contact in their intercultural friendships. In contrast, in the third example the participant felt that she was being excluded, a feeling triggered by inadequate self-disclosure in terms of limited contact between herself and a host student. Thus, the extent of self-disclosure underpinned participants' sense of intimacy in their intercultural friendships.

Moreover, some participants identified the facilitating factors of developing intimacy in intercultural friendship. First, I and C held the view that close proximity provided more opportunities for them to meet and interact with host students and thus facilitated the development of their close host friendships, which supports Kudo and Simkin's (2003, p. 99) argument that 'propinquity was an essential element of friendship formation, since it created the frequent intercultural contacts'. Second, D noted that similarity in personality and life attitudes promoted her intimate friendship with a host student:

从我俩（被采访者和一个英国学生）性格来讲，都是跟外国人在一块不感到难受的那种，之前都有和外国人相处的 experience，对国外的文化都很 interesting。再一点就是宗教的原因，我还不是这个圈儿的时候也对这个很感兴趣，她作为一个 preacher，带我去了解这块东西就是她的 responsibility……宗教原因还是挺强的。(D2)

We (the participant and a British student) are both that kind of person who feels comfortable about staying with foreigners. We both have previous experiences of communicating with foreigners. Both of us are very interested in foreign cultures. Another factor is religion. I had already been very interested in Christianity even before I was a

Christian. As a preacher, it was her responsibility to guide me to know Christianity more ...

Religion is a very strong factor (for promoting our intimate friendship). (D2)

This factor is also reported as a development theme in Sudweeks et al.'s (1990) study about intimate intercultural relationships, i.e., people in highly intimate relationships share many attitudes/value similarities. As shown above, D shared lots of similarities regarding life attitudes and worldviews with her Christian host friend, such as an attitude of openness towards intercultural communication, as well as a strong interest in and commitment to Christianity. The latter was further illustrated by my observation of D's regular and prolonged engagements in local Christian events with her host friend in her spare time. Thus, proximity and attitude/value similarities were perceived as two essential developmental factors of the participants' intimate intercultural friendships.

Furthermore, some participants reckoned that cultural differences or identities were not issues in their intimate intercultural friendships:

人的本质都是一样，不管文化差别有多大……他可能在不熟悉你的时候对你害怕，可能对你不知道怎么办……感觉（像）我们对英国人一样。一熟悉你之后，一旦用他的真心和你的真心，两个人互相对等的关系的时候，就发现其实人和人都是一样的，不存在中国人外国人或者什么文化了。(F2)

Human nature is all the same, no matter how big cultural differences are ... He (the British) may be afraid of you when he's not familiar with you, and he may not know how to treat you... Just like how we feel when encountering the British. Once he's familiar with you, and once you two are involved in a mutual relationship in which you can both feel sincerity from each other, you'll find that humans are all the same, and there will be no such things like Chinese, foreigners or cultures. (F2)

有时候也有像一家人一样的感觉……就是我们有个泰国人嘛，跟其他三个人，我们经常会在走廊里面玩一些游戏啊，大家一起聊天啊之类的。就会突然感觉，哎他不是泰国人，我也不是中国人，就是……感觉（我们）像一个地方来的——但是不会 care

我们是哪里的，他是哪里的，就可能会忘了这些东西……（因为）大家都很开心嘛。

(K1)

Sometimes it feels like we are a family ... There is a Thai student who often plays games and chats with us three in the corridor, or something like that. I may suddenly feel that he's not Thai and I'm not Chinese... It feels like (we) were from the same place—but I wouldn't care about where we're from or where he's from, as I may forget these things ... (because) everyone is so happy. (K1)

These accounts indicate that the participants gradually engage more in communication on a personal rather than cultural level as the intimacy in their intercultural friendships enhanced, which led to their forgetfulness regarding cultural identities or even the general concept of 'culture' itself. Thus, it is evident that these participants developed a more individualized self–other orientation from their intimate intercultural friendship experiences, as they tended to 'see oneself and others on the basis of unique individual qualities' rather than 'being restricted by categories of social grouping' (Kim, 2005, p. 392). Culture receded into the background in the participants' constructions of intimacy in their intercultural friendships.

Such a changed self–other orientation developed from intimate intercultural friendship experiences further influenced the participants' general perspective and attitude towards intercultural communication and connections. Specifically, they highlighted the value of not stereotyping others or over-exaggerating the effects of cultural differences in order to promote intercultural interactions and rapport:

我原来最基本的原则就是我不会太积极主动地去靠近你，我希望是你来靠近我。……可能是基于我对他们文化的概念，我觉得他们的文化就是开放的，热情<sup>5</sup>的……因为有了这个 **stereotype** 在，我觉得他们就应该是主动靠近我，而不应该我去主动靠近他们。因为我们的文化是含蓄的，内敛的。……这是我原来的想法，但是我现在不这么想……因为这个东西好像没有以前想的那么重要……现在感觉是他们是热情的，但中国人……虽然表现很不热情，但是其实内心也是热情的，我觉得更多的是相同性，不存在一定要是热情的去 **approach** 不热情的，（因为）都是热情的，就不存在这个问题了。……会让我更在乎平等交流，不会等他来靠近我。(F2)

My previous principle was that I would not take the initiative to approach you (the British), and I expect you to approach me first. ... This was probably based on my understanding of their culture, as I felt that the characteristics of their culture were openness and extroversion. ... Because of this stereotype, I thought they should approach me first rather than it being me taking the initiative, as our culture was characterized by being implicit and introverted. ... This was my previous way of thinking, but now I no longer think in this way ... Because it seems that this difference is not as important as I previously thought ... I now feel that they are indeed extroverted, but the Chinese ... Although our outlook may not seem that extroverted, in fact we are extroverted inwardly. I now experience more similarities, and there's no such thing like 'those who are extroverted need to approach those who are not', (because) all of us are extroverted and therefore this issue no longer exists. ... I now care more about communicating equally, and I would not wait for others to approach me first. (F2)

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<sup>5</sup> I translate the word “热情” in this language context into “extroversion” or “extroverted”, rather than into its English equivalent “enthusiasm” or “enthusiastic”. This is because “热情” here indicates the characteristics of an outgoing personality while “enthusiastic” refers to “feeling or showing a lot of excitement and interest about somebody/something” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016). As such, in this context “热情” and “enthusiastic” represent very different conceptual features, hence a direct translation would lead to misrepresentation of the original term. Instead, the key meaning of “热情” here is better captured by the word “extroverted”, which refers to “lively and confident, and enjoying being with other people” (Oxford Dictionaries, 2016) and thus suggests the features of an outgoing personality in its meaning.

我觉得他们跟中国人没什么区别。我还是会放下这种 culture barrier 的东西，如果你们真的是 meant to be together，你们就是 meant to be together，语言不是 barrier，culture 也不是 barrier。 (D2)

I think there's no difference between them (the British) and the Chinese. I would put aside things like culture barriers. If you are really meant to be together, you are. Language and culture are not barriers. (D2)

These accounts demonstrate the participants' ability 'to see the oneness and unity of humanity and locate the points of consent and complementarity beyond the points of difference and contention' (Kim, 2005, p. 392) in their intercultural encounters in which they emphasized paying more attention to similarities between each other rather than presupposing differences, which in turn enhanced the potential of decreasing perceived distances and promoting intercultural connections. These ideas suggest that in addition to being able to 'recognize, accept, and appreciate different views and ideas' as proposed by Chen and Starosta (1997, p. 7), open-mindedness in intercultural encounters should also incorporate 'overcoming cultural parochialism and forming a wider circle of identification' in order to shape 'a perspective of a larger, more inclusive whole' (Kim, 2005, p. 392). In other words, open-mindedness in intercultural encounters not only means embracing differences, but also discovering and valuing similarities between each other.

To summarize, in this subsection I have explored the participants' understanding of intimacy in their intercultural friendships, the factors that promoted their sense of intimacy, and the implications of their intimate intercultural friendship experiences for the development of their self-other orientation as well as perspective and attitude towards intercultural communication. The participants saw open self-disclosure as an essential sign of intimacy in their intercultural friendships. They identified close proximity as well as personality similarities and shared values as important developmental factors

of intimate intercultural friendship. It also appears that cultural issues (such as cultural differences and identities) did not frame the participants' sense of intimacy in their intercultural friendships. Such experiences of intercultural friendships led to participants' more individualized self–other orientation and a more open-minded perspective, which embraces both individual uniqueness and similarity while discouraging the view of differentiating people solely on the basis of their cultural backgrounds.

In addition to pursuing intimacy, the participants also valued a sense of sincerity in their interpersonal intercultural relationships, which is examined next.

### **5.3.2 Valuing sincerity in interpersonal intercultural relationships**

From the participants' perspective, sincerity<sup>6</sup> in interpersonal intercultural relationships was mainly focused on three issues: commitment in romantic relationships, being friendly without pre-conditions, and friendly actions.

First, some participants viewed keeping commitments as a crucial sign of sincere intercultural romantic relationships which is highly valued in Asian culture. At least in the cases of the participants, such a view influenced their decision making or underpinned a feeling of not being treated seriously in such relationships:

有这么一个（英国）男生，我们两个都互相有好感，但是他可能觉得中国人把感情看得很重很重……他原话是，他不确定他可以负起在一段恋爱关系中需要负起的责

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<sup>6</sup> It is necessary to clarify what the word “sincerity” refers to in this study context: the English translation of the Chinese word “真诚”. The word “真诚” has both “真” (the quality of not being hypocritical) and “诚” (the quality of being honest) as its central conceptual features. However, as suggested by many English dictionaries (e.g., Cambridge Dictionaries Online, 2016; Macmillan Dictionary, 2016; Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2015), the key word in the definition of “sincerity” is “honesty”, and only a few dictionaries put “freedom from hypocrisy” in addition to “honesty” in their definitions of “sincerity” (e.g., Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2015). In other words, there is a subtle difference in meaning between the words “真诚” and “sincerity” as the two do not share exactly the same core conceptual features. Thus, it is necessary to highlight the conceptual feature “freedom from hypocrisy” in the English translation to ensure non-Chinese readers get a complete idea of the key meaning of “真诚”. As a result, the word “sincerity” in this study is defined as “honesty and freedom from hypocrisy”.

任……虽然一般中国人这样想，但是起码我当时是想，既然有好感那就在一起尝试一下呗，不用那么认真。（但是）我又不好把这种话说出来。{是什么原因阻止你说了这句话？}我会觉得这么说了之后显得我很不负责任似的，我不想让我在他看起来很不负责任。(I1)

There was a (British) boy. We liked each other, but he might have thought that Chinese treat romantic relationships very, very seriously ... He said he wasn't sure if he could commit to a relationship... Although normally the Chinese take it seriously, I felt, at least at that point, that since we liked each other, we could give it a try getting together without taking it that seriously. (But) I found it difficult to put this feeling into words. {What made you feel difficult to tell this feeling to him?} I felt that if I told him, I may leave him with the impression that I did not treat commitment (in romantic relationships) seriously. (I1)

有可能是文化差异，就是亚洲人可能对感情比较严肃一些，但是外国人比较随便，我觉得可能是这种文化冲突让我们觉得倍受伤害了。(C1)

Probably it is the effect of cultural differences. That is, Asians may take romantic relationships more seriously, but foreigners may have a relatively casual attitude. I think perhaps it is this kind of cultural conflict that makes us feel deeply hurt. (C1)

Thus, it is evident that failure to commit from either the participants' own or their partners' side would lower their satisfaction in regard to their intercultural romantic relationships.

Second, the participants valued friendliness without pre-conditions (e.g., levels of familiarity between each other, cultural backgrounds, and self-interests) as it indicated a sincere attitude in intercultural friendships:

那个时候也就刚认识，自己在一个人生地不熟的地方，而且是她（一个英国学生）的同胞，同族欺负你，她会站在你的立场去回应他们，就让你感觉很感动。(E2)

At that point I had just met her (a British student) and I was in an unfamiliar place. Her compatriots bullied me and she responded to them from my position, which made me feel so touched. (E2)

我那天出去玩，要赶（另一个城市的）凌晨四点的火车，那个英国女孩就主动提出来三点钟把我送出去。（因为）很远嘛……（而且她）第二天还要上班。她说这就是朋友间能为对方做的，所以就感动……将心比心吧，把你的事当自己的事，真心对待你的感觉。(F2)

I needed to catch a train (in another city) at 4 a.m. for a trip, and that British girl made a spontaneous offer to take me there at 3 a.m. It was so far away... (and she also) needed to go to work in the morning. She said this was what friends can do for each other, which made me feel so touched ... I felt this was a very empathetic attitude, as she treated you sincerely and she dealt with your business as if dealing with her own business. (F2)

Third, the participants also treasured friendly actions (rather than just verbal friendly expressions) in their interpersonal intercultural relationships and treated it as another essential reflection of sincerity:

其实我就偏向于你（一个英国同学）收下我的礼物，你不要说你要送（礼物）给我，这也没什么。你说要送然后又不送，这样让我觉得是嘴上一套，做的（另）一套那种。……我情真意切，人家轻描淡写，就这种感觉。(E2)

In fact, I would prefer that you (a British student) accepted my gift without saying that you were going to give me (a gift) in return, which was OK to me. You said you were going to send me a gift without actually doing so, which made me feel that you didn't keep your promises. ... It feels like I cherish our friendship so much, while you don't take it seriously at all. (E2)

有一个本科生要走了（度暑假），走之前（给）每个人 Facebook 上（留言）说我会大概提前几天跟你（们）say goodbye。当时我没放在心上。后来她真的来了，她真的很用心的，哪怕知道我们再也见不到面了，你能这样子把我当回事……就是有一种温暖的感觉。(M2)

An undergraduate student was going to leave (the university for the summer vacation). She messaged each of us on Facebook, saying 'I am going to say goodbye to you a few days before I leave'. I didn't take it seriously then, but later she did come. She really took it seriously. Even if we were not going to see each other again in the future, I was still on her mind...I got a very warm feeling about that. (M2)



According to Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998, p. 26), displaying friendliness in the Chinese culture 'is embedded in the acts of helping and caring for one another rather than in overt verbal messages'. In the participants' cases shown above, such a characteristic greatly influenced their constructions of and evaluations about others' sincerity: they not only cherished friendly actions much more than friendly verbal messages, but also viewed actions as a crucial criterion for judging others' extent of sincerity. Therefore, actions rather than words were paid the utmost attention when participants evaluated sincerity in their interpersonal intercultural relationships.

The participants' constructions of emotions outlined above capture the moral standards they held regarding interpersonal intercultural relationships. Planalp (1999, p. 6) argues that 'emotions do not and cannot hide from moral judgements' and are 'founded in ideals'. In the above examples, the participants' emotional responses underpinned by their ideals of sincerity reveal their moral positions on what was desirable and undesirable in interpersonal intercultural relationships, which was an organic part of their intercultural adjustment experiences and informed their decision-making, expectations and judgements vis-à-vis others in their relationship development processes.

Moreover, compared with their constructions of intimacy which were focused on interpersonal communication processes, the participants' understanding of sincerity was more embedded with cultural meanings and clash of cultural values. This reflects Berger and Luckmann's (1966) point that individuals' moral assumptions about the world are the product of their previous socialization, which took place within specific sociocultural environments.

In this subsection so far I have discussed the participants' constructions of sincerity which shed light on their value orientation toward interpersonal intercultural relationships. Specifically, a sense of sincerity was reflected in terms of keeping commitments in intercultural romantic relationships, as well as friendliness without pre-conditions and friendly actions in intercultural

friendships. These constructions carry moral meanings which were acquired in their previous Chinese socialization, as they reflect what can be viewed as 'good' interpersonal intercultural relationships from the participants' eyes. They had practical effects on the participants' understanding of and actions towards their own intercultural relationships.

### **5.3.3 Conclusions**

A close examination of the participants' constructions of emotions as they developed interpersonal intercultural relationships in this section unfolds their key needs (i.e. intimacy) and ideals (i.e. sincerity) in such relationships. The participants' experiences and understanding of intimacy in their intercultural friendships demonstrate the universal aspect of interpersonal relationship development, which highlights the importance of open self-disclosure as well as paying attention to individual uniqueness and shared characteristics. On the other hand, the participants' pursuit of sincerity in intercultural relationships had an emphasis on commitment and friendly actions (rather than verbal expressions) which was laden with more specific moral standards and cultural values. Such a complex picture of the participants' constructions of emotions in interpersonal intercultural relationship development suggests that in order to understand real-life intercultural adjustment phenomena more soundly, equal attention needs to be paid to both differences and similarities as well as both cultural and individual aspects of the communication processes. Such a point was also embraced by the participants' own intercultural perspective evolved from their intimate intercultural friendship experiences, which highlights treating people as individuals and valuing similarities rather than presupposing differences. As such, by emphasizing the importance of 'an awareness of the relative nature of values and of the universal aspect of human nature' (Yoshikawa, 1978, p. 220, cited in Kim, 2005, p. 392), the findings in this section expand the conceptual domain of open-mindedness proposed in Chen and

Starosta's (1997, 2000) work which is focused on acknowledging and accepting differences.

In addition, the significance of close proximity indicates that both interpersonal and situational factors had effects on the participants' constructions of intimacy in their friendship development processes. Thus, again, a holistic interpretation of sojourners' affective intercultural adjustment experiences in real-life contexts calls for taking all the relevant conditional factors, including interpersonal factors and contextual specificities, into investigation.

## **Chapter summary**

In this chapter I have examined the processes of the participants' constructions of emotions in two specific intercultural contexts: task performance and interpersonal relationship development, in order to shed light on their major adjustment concerns in these two contexts and the relevant conditional factors which interacted with these constructions.

The participants aimed for competence in their task performance (in terms of getting a clear understanding about the host sociocultural environment, being able to deal with the demands in the host environment effectively and with ease) and paid special attention to their positive self-presentation in classroom discussions. They demonstrated a selective adjustment orientation in task performance with a major focus on their needs of passing academic assessments, which was further promoted by certain historical (i.e., previous learning experiences) and interpersonal (i.e., the strict attitude of relevant academic staff) factors. Their concern about preserving face in classroom discussions was the product of their previous Chinese socialization which largely restricted their willingness to participate in discussions. However, such reluctance was gradually overcome in some participants' cases due to the influences of the encouraging attitudes from academic staff and other peer

students, while some other participants did not experience a big change in this regard as the interactive atmosphere in the classroom context was not as strong. The findings highlight the significance of individual agency in shaping participants' adjustment experiences, the instrumental focus of their adjustment concerns (i.e., getting the taught masters degree), the demanding nature of intercultural adjustment which involves suspending habitual beliefs and attitudes in addition to cultural learning, and the crucial effects of a variety of historical, interpersonal and situational factors on participants' affective intercultural adjustment experiences.

The participants also desired a level of intimacy in their intercultural friendships and expected sincerity in their interpersonal intercultural relationships. Their sense of intimacy was underpinned by open self-disclosure and was facilitated by close proximity as well as personality similarities and shared values. Sincerity, on the other hand, was reflected in terms of commitment in romantic relationships, being friendly without pre-conditions, and friendly actions. While experiencing intimacy promoted the participants' more inclusive intercultural perspective such as an open-mindedness which values individual uniqueness and similarities between individuals and discourages the presupposing of differences in intercultural communication, the participants' understanding of sincerity embraced moral standards developed from their Chinese socialization. Thus, the participants' adjustment concerns in interpersonal relationship development were related to both cultural and individual matters as well as both differences and similarities, which are worthy of equal attention in order to yield a more holistic and critical understanding of sojourners' adjustment processes.

In the next two chapters, I examine the participants' responses to emotions in intercultural communication with a view to revealing their various adjustment actions as well as the effects of relevant sociocultural and historical factors on these actions.

## **Chapter 6 Responses to emotions in intercultural adjustment: Changing oneself**

### **6.1 Introduction**

As introduced at the beginning of Chapter 4, in Chapters 6 and 7 I investigate the action part of the participants' experiences of emotions in their intercultural communication and adjustment in the host environment. I am aiming specifically to address the second and third research questions of this study in these two chapters:

*RQ2: How do Chinese students in a UK university respond to their emotions in their intercultural adjustment processes in the host environment?*

*RQ3: What are the relevant sociocultural and historical factors that influence the development processes of these responses?*

According to Anderson (1994), there are four ways for individual sojourners to respond to the host environment: changing oneself, changing the environment, walking away, or doing nothing. She further argues that the first two responses are the only adaptive instrumental options available for sojourners to integrate themselves into the host environment better. My data suggest that the participants adopted all four of these ways of reacting as they responded to their emotions in their intercultural communication and adjustment processes. In this chapter, I examine the participants' adoption of the first instrumental option in their responses to emotions, i.e., changing oneself in terms of managing one's ways of thinking about the emotion eliciting events or situations. In the next chapter I will move on to explore the participants' usage of another instrumental option, i.e., changing the environment by managing emotion eliciting events or situations, as well as other ways of responding (i.e., emotion-focused coping and avoidance).

In this chapter, I present four key themes (detailed below) which capture the participants' specific strategies of managing their ways of thinking about the emotion eliciting events or situations in their intercultural encounters, followed by conclusions and a chapter summary.

## **6.2 Managing the ways of thinking about the emotion eliciting events or situations**

As shown in the introduction above, the participants managed their interpretations about the emotion eliciting events or situations as one way of adjusting to the host environment. Specifically, four sub-strategies were adopted: encountering the new environment: promoting open-mindedness and developing self-monitoring skills (6.2.1); confronting the adjustment challenges: guiding thoughts in more desirable directions (6.2.2); having confidence in intercultural encounters (6.2.3); and managing the perceived importance of the events or situations in intercultural communication (6.2.4). These sub-strategies are outlined and discussed respectively as follows.

### **6.2.1 Encountering the new environment: Promoting open-mindedness and developing self-monitoring skills**

The data suggest that many of the participants became less emotional as they gradually became familiar with and more aware of the features in the host environment (such as the encouragement to make contributions in class, the valuing of students' opinions, etc.), which also had the potential to facilitate their acceptance and respectful attitude towards how things are done in the host culture:

担心（上课发言）浪费大家时间，不能说全没了吧，但是会好一些。可能就是因为其他人也说很多，老师好像没有表现出什么不耐烦啊，大家都会很认真的分析你的观点，这可能会降低一下那种感觉。(A2)

My worries of wasting others' class time (by making contributions to class) have lessened.

Probably because other students also speak a lot (in class), and the teachers are not

impatient. Moreover, everyone analyses your views very carefully. These things may have helped me to reduce that kind of feeling. (A2)

现在我习惯了。当时觉得 surprise 是因为觉得，哇这边老师还真听学生说话哪。现在听太多了，所以不觉得这是个事儿了……已经把它当成理所当然的事了。(D2)

Now I am used to it. I was surprised initially because I felt, 'Wow, teachers here do take students' opinions seriously!' Now, since I've experienced this sort of thing many times, I no longer feel this is a big deal ... I've already taken it for granted. (D2)

肯定你刚来 shock 比较多，熟悉后对文化感觉就这么回事其实，可能跟你不一样，（但是）它就这样运转的，也没有奇怪到哪去。(F2)

You definitely feel more shocked when you have just arrived, but later as you are more familiar with the culture, you tend to feel 'That's just the way it is'. The culture may be different from yours, (but) it just work in such ways, ways which are not that strange. (F2)

The above examples demonstrate the participants' development of open-mindedness in intercultural encounters, which requires individuals to be willing 'to recognize, accept, and appreciate different views and ideas' (Chen and Starosta, 1997, p. 7). In the participants' cases, such a development involves several issues. It first involves familiarizing oneself with the host environment to raise one's cultural awareness of this environment, which has the effect of neutralizing the emotional responses elicited by the perceived cultural differences as 'the more familiar things become to us, the less capacity they have to arouse us emotionally' (Planalp, 1999, p. 21). It also includes developing accepting and respectful attitudes towards the host culture's ways during this familiarization process as well as internalizing such attitudes as a habit into one's daily routines (Anderson, 1994; Kim, 2005).

Moreover, the participants' attitudes of accepting and respecting other cultures further promoted their sensitivity towards the sociocultural features in various interactional situations in order to achieve behaviour appropriateness and positive self-presentation in such situations:

我真是很怕影响了国人形象。比如说我去参观教堂，有没有什么 no camera, no smoking 啊，赶紧看一下。不要什么事情都不假思索，不计后果。就是比较注意小心了。(M2)

I'm really concerned about adversely affecting the social image of the Chinese (if I get something wrong). (Hence) when I go to visit the Church, for example, I pay extra attention to see if there are signs such as 'No photographs' or 'No smoking' there. Don't act without considering the potential consequences. In a word, I'm more careful now. (M2)

说什么都得小心一点。不要想啥就说啥，或者说之前问一问，你们怎么看待 xx……（否则对方）会觉得很奇怪，就很突兀……不要以为你知道了，他就全都知道，你怎么认为，他就怎么认为。(E1)

You need to be more careful when you speak. Don't express your thinking outright, or you could ask 'What do you think about XX?' first ... (Otherwise) others may find your words very strange and incongruous ... Don't assume that they know what you know, or that they think in the same ways you do. (E1)

The above accounts reflect the concept of 'self-monitoring' proposed by Chen and Starosta (1997, p. 7), which 'refers to a person's ability to regulate behavior in order to match situational constraints and to implement a conversationally competent behavior'. As illustrated above, by being alerted by the specific features of their environments and showing willingness to understand others' views in conversations, the participants monitored themselves in ways to create positive self-presentations and adjust their behaviour to fit the interactional situations better (Chen and Starosta, 1997).

As such, it is evident that intercultural adjustment is clearly not restricted to cultural learning (Anderson, 1994) by way of familiarizing oneself with the local situations with the outcome of enhanced cultural awareness, as it also involves attitude management and the development of habits towards cultural acceptance and respect, as well as the development of self-monitoring skills which leads to behaviour appropriateness and positive self-presentation. Thus,



intercultural adjustment covers multiple issues and is therefore a very complex and demanding process.

However, some participants did not develop a more accepting attitude towards certain aspects of the host academic environment even when they had become familiarized with them:

我觉得浪费大家时间我依旧会担心。因为我有遇见过我有同学上课问，我很烦的感觉。

我觉得如果是我，上课问同样的东西，别人会烦。因为那个同学就是没认真听，老师明明刚说过，然后就问半天……我就觉得浪费大家时间。(F2)

I am still concerned about wasting others' class time. Because I felt very annoyed when one classmate asked questions in class. I think if I were him and asked the same thing in class, others would feel annoyed. Because he didn't listen to the teacher attentively before raising his question, as what he asked had just been explained by the teacher, but he spent a lot of time discussing that question... I felt it was a waste of others' time. (F2)

A comparison of this account with previous ones illustrates that the participants' extent of adjusting to the host environment may differ from individual to individual. In this account, the participant conveyed more doubts than acceptance about the freedom of speaking up in class due to her concern of wasting other peers' class time by making low-quality contributions, while in the previous accounts other participants put more emphasis on accepting and getting used to the host culture's ways. Therefore, these examples suggest that sojourners' intercultural adjustment orientations are multiple and characterized by individual uniqueness (Anderson, 1994).

Furthermore, taking intercultural romantic relationship as an example, one participant commented on the necessity of keeping a critical eye and not attributing all undesired intercultural experiences to the effects of cultural differences. In other words, not all undesired behaviour in intercultural encounters can be tolerated and there were limits in adopting an accepting attitude:

要把他当做一个男人，而不是当做一个外国男人。因为他是外国男人，所以他做这些，可能是他文化上的（原因），可以理解——不是的。我觉得不管什么样的文化，他作

为一个男朋友就得尊重自己的女朋友……如果这个人已经违反了人性本身的一些东西，那就不管中国人外国人，绝对一视同仁，kick out。(D1)

You need to view him as a *man*, rather than as a foreign man. Because he's a foreigner, it's understandable that he does such things due to cultural differences—No, it's not. I think no matter which culture one belongs to, as a boyfriend, he's obliged to respect his girlfriend ... If someone does something that violates the characteristics of human nature itself, then no matter whether they are Chinese or foreign, you absolutely need to treat them equally and kick them out. (D1)

It is clear that the participant's perceived bottom line of adopting an accepting attitude in intercultural encounters worked under the assumption that human behaviour need to obey the basic laws of interpersonal interactions (such as respecting others), which to her were universal and transcended cultural boundaries. Whether there are such universal laws seems to be a controversial topic; however, this account does shed light on the danger of over-emphasizing differences in intercultural communication which could lead to inaccurate judgments about others' behaviour. As such, it indicates the participants' awareness of paying equal attention to similarities in addition to differences with a view of promoting more informed understanding in intercultural communication.

In summation, when encountering the new host sociocultural environment the participants promoted their open-mindedness by ways of familiarizing themselves with the environment, developing their cultural acceptance and respect, and internalizing such attitudes as a habit. Their open-mindedness further promoted their self-monitoring skills towards behaviour appropriateness and positive self-presentations in the host context. However, the fact that not all the participants became more accepting to all the aspects of the host academic culture sheds light on the uniqueness of individual sojourners' intercultural adjustment experiences. In addition, some of the participants demonstrated their critical awareness of not overemphasizing differences and

paying equal attention to similarities to facilitate understanding in intercultural communication.

### **6.2.2 Confronting the adjustment challenges: Guiding thoughts in more desirable directions**

The participants also guided their thoughts in more desirable directions when coping with their negative emotions triggered by their adjustment problems. This was done by consciously boosting adjustment motivation, developing positive ways of viewing things, and being prepared to accept the imagined 'worst' situations.

First, many of them highlighted the importance of making conscious efforts to develop an adaptive and flexible attitude and to manage their undesired emotions with the aims of overcoming adjustment obstacles and facilitating better integration into the host academic environment, which was perceived as one of their studying abroad obligations:

还是靠自己克服吧。……虽然环境可能不太适合你，但是你得为这个环境改变一下我觉得。不改变就适应不了啊。(F1)

You need to rely on yourself to overcome it. ... The environment may not suit you, but I think you still need to change yourself. If you don't change, you will not be able to adjust to the environment. (F1)

我觉得（课堂发言）也不紧张了，一开始还是会紧张的……我觉得这是应该改变自己的。(H1)

Now I no longer feel nervous (when answering questions in class). I used to feel nervous at the beginning... Because I think I needed to change myself in this respect. (H1)

These accounts demonstrate the value of keeping 'a willingness to face obstacles head-on' (Anderson, 1994, p. 309) on promoting the participants' adjustment to the host academic context, as such a willingness was perceived as the starting point of making academic adjustments towards integration and academic success.

Second, the participants emphasized the positive aspects of things (e.g., the friendliness of the majority of people in the UK) or seeking a positive understanding of what happened to them (e.g., the positive value of engaging in intercultural communication in terms of improving spoken English and intercultural understanding) as a way of managing emotions in their intercultural encounters:

被歧视这种事情肯定是避免不了的，但是大多数人还是友好的，所以没有必要太在意。

(E1)

Things like being discriminated against are inevitable, but most of the people here are friendly, so never mind. (E1)

我很淡定啊！我不会觉得，一个外国人坐下来跟你讲话你好紧张，该怎么说……我会觉得，哈，机会锻炼口语，交流文化……(M1)

I was very calm. I didn't feel nervous and wonder what to say when a foreigner sat down and talked with me ... I felt excited about it, and I took it as an opportunity to practice my spoken English and communicate about cultural things ... (M1)

我不会像别人那样，遇到问题就抱怨……就觉得完全不同的两种人在讲话的时候也挺好玩的……可能以后在职场上跟一些别的人交流我觉得也是有帮助的。如果以后你接触到了一个外国人，你就不一定会觉得他说什么话就特别惊讶，或者说他这么做事情你也不会比较不能接受。(L1)

Unlike others, I didn't just complain when encountering problems ... I feel that it's interesting when two completely different kinds of people interact with each other ... Perhaps it will also be helpful for your communication with others in working environments in the future. If you come into contact with a foreigner, you won't feel anything he said was particularly surprising, or you won't feel his way of doing things is unacceptable. (L1)

Such a strategy of consciously guiding one's thoughts to directions that would reduce negative emotions or promote positive ones is termed as "reappraisal", i.e., to "reformulate initial interpretations of threat ...into interpretations of

promise and potential success”, in Metts and Planalp’s (2011, p. 288) work. In the above examples, by reappraising their intercultural encounters, the participants managed to decrease their anger at being discriminated against, and the anxiety of communicating with non-Chinese people, as well as enhancing their potential to build friendly intercultural relationships and engage in fruitful intercultural interactions which would lead towards mutual understanding. Therefore, the participants’ reappraisal of their initially perceived undesired experiences may facilitate the development of more positive and productive intercultural events.

Reappraising environmental challenges and complexities which emerged during their studying abroad period may also bring about a more positive life attitude for the participants:

我会心理比较平和，以后再遇到各种事情。有的时候你没有办法去选择你生活的环境……我现在就了解到，英国反正就是这样一个生活状态，中国就是这样的生活状态，如此而已。……我感觉我会更适应环境的变迁。(D1)

I will feel more peaceful when encountering various kinds of things in the future.

Sometimes you are not able to choose the environments in which you live ... I now realize that life in the UK is just like this, and life in China is just like that. That's it. ... I feel that I am better able to adapt to changes in life environments. (D1)

你在外国留学的话肯定是要经历各种不同的体验。如果你只是很一帆风顺，不需要任何习惯上的调整或者挑战的话，那我觉得跟国内是完全没有区别的。在国外学习的话，你首先学习和生活上要兼顾，就是一种挑战。但是人我觉得就是在不断挑战中成长，这也是留学带给你的有价值的一面。(B1)

You are bound to experience various kinds of experiences if you study in a foreign country. If you just lead an easy life and never experience any adjustments in your habits or encounter any challenges, then I think this way of life would not be different from staying in your home country at all. You need to balance your study and life as you study abroad,

and this is a challenge. But I feel that people just grow up as they encounter constant challenges, which is an added value of studying abroad. (B1)

As such, the participants gradually developed a more positive attitude towards life changes by highlighting the benefits of becoming more adaptive and promoting self-growth in dealing with these changes. Thus, by viewing life changes as opportunities rather than challenges, reappraisal has the further potential of promoting the participants' self-transformation and emotional well-being in intercultural encounters.

Moreover, the participants prepared themselves psychologically to accept the occurrence of the imagined 'worst' situations, such as failing the assignments despite their efforts or having to rewrite the assignments in a limited time period:

尽人事听天命吧，你真的把它努力做完了，如果还是不过那就是命了。(E2)

Man proposes, God disposes. All you need to do is to try your best. If you still fail, then that is fate. (E2)

万一（我现在正在写的作业）又挂了，还能怎么地，重写呗！想开些。还一个月时间，好好安排，一定可以的。(M2)

What if I fail (my current assignment) again? Just rewrite it then! Don't be so stressed.

There is still one month left, so I can do it as long as I manage my time well. (M2)

Thus, sometimes the participants also guided their thoughts in a negative direction by 'expecting the worst and so being pleasantly surprised when it doesn't happen' (Planalp, 1999, p. 79). As shown above, such a strategy enabled them to release their academic stress to a certain extent, which was also helpful for them in enabling them to concentrate on their academic tasks at hand.

To sum up, boosting adjustment motivation, developing more positive interpretations and life attitudes as well as making psychological preparations to accept the occurrence of the 'worst' situations helped the participants to be more adaptable to unexpected, unpleasant or demanding situations, to shift their perspective towards positive and productive directions, to release their

adjustment stress and to concentrate more on dealing with the tasks at hand. In other words, it motivated the participants to take productive adjustment actions, promoted satisfaction in their intercultural encounters, and helped them to concentrate on the adjustment tasks.

### **6.2.3 Having confidence in intercultural encounters**

The participants also developed a more confident attitude in terms of being braver and more relaxed when managing their anxiety in intercultural encounters:

胆子大说就是了阿。我觉得你要主动给别人说，别人也不会不愿意搭理你啊什么的。

{所以主要还是把自己心理那一关给克服了是吧? }对。(K2)

Be brave and speak out, that's it. I think if you take the initiative to speak with others, they will respond to you. {So it's important to overcome your own psychological barriers?} Yes.

(K2)

我觉得跟英国人相处，你不要遇到一个什么事然后，啊是我自己的问题，这样的话会非常阻碍你跟他们继续交流 ……不要想太多，该做什么事情就做什么就好了，做错了也没关系……我发现其实他们对外国人也是有包容性的，比如你做（错）个什么他们（会想）‘啊， because you are a foreigner’。(D2)

I think when getting along with the British, there's no need to keep on finding faults with yourself when things go wrong, as this really hampers your communications with them afterwards ... Don't think too much and just do what you need to do. It doesn't matter even if you do things wrong ... I find that they have tolerance for foreigners. For example, if you did things (wrong) they (would think), 'Oh, (it's OK) because you are a foreigner'.

(D2)

These comments highlight the importance of promoting self-esteem in intercultural encounters, which refers to ‘a sense of self-value or self-worth’ (Chen and Starosta, 1997, p. 6) and is reflected by the individuals’ ability to be confident and express an optimistic outlook in intercultural communication (Chen and Starosta, 1997). The participants’ accounts above suggest that high

self-esteem is essential in initiating and maintaining intercultural interactions, which could be further strengthened by the accepting and tolerant attitudes of others. Therefore, the development of self-esteem in intercultural communication seems to be the joint outcome of individual effort and contextual support.

#### **6.2.4 Managing the perceived importance of the events or situations in intercultural communication**

The participants also managed the perceived importance of certain intercultural events or situations to make better use of their emotional energy towards enhanced emotional well-being and better fulfilment of their key concerns. Specifically, they did so by engaging in self-reflections and putting themselves in another's shoes, lowering expectations and setting priorities.

First, the participants tried to reflect on their own ways of thinking and put themselves in another's shoes. This helped to explain others' behaviour (regarding issues such as appropriate presentation behaviour) from their perspective rather than that of the participants, to raise awareness of the participants' own misunderstanding towards others, as well as to experience others' feelings and thoughts about the issues that led to prejudices in intercultural encounters:

我觉得我们中国人会坚持于一些无所谓的礼貌……他们不会觉得心里有憋屈，“你凭什么把我的给说了？”他们可能根本就不在意这种情绪，可能根本就是我们中国人自己在意。(C1)

I think we Chinese may insist on some courtesy things that don't matter a lot to others...They will not feel that they have been taken advantage of. 'Why did you present my ideas as yours?' They probably don't care about this feeling at all. It's probably the case that only we Chinese care. (C1)

你会觉得他不了解很正常。就包括我们对他们也会有误解啊，只是可能我们不知道。(H1)



You feel it's normal if he doesn't understand. We ourselves may also misunderstand them.

It may just be the case that we don't realize it. (H1)

反正是事出有因，你想老外说中国女生好搞，其实我可以理解，因为肯定是有这样一坨女孩子很容易被搞啊。(J1)

Anyway, things happen for a reason. I can understand some foreigners' thoughts that

Chinese girls are easy to get, as there must be a type of girls who are easy to get. (J1)

Such a strategy reflects the idea of empathy, which refers to stepping into others' shoes in order to access to others' views and experience others' feelings (Chen and Starosta, 1997, 2000). As such, empathy is underpinned by an 'ethnorelative' worldview proposed in Bennett's (2004) work which emphasizes valuing the importance of various realities in addition to one's own while discouraging the ethnocentric viewpoint of treating one's own reality as 'the only basis for perceiving events' (Bennett, 2004, p. 73). In the above examples, by looking at things from the perspective of others and consciously reflecting on their own tendency of misunderstanding others, the participants decreased their negative emotions, developed a more informed understanding of others' behaviour, and enhanced an accepting and empathetic attitude towards others' misunderstandings or prejudice in intercultural encounters. In other words, adopting an ethnorelative perspective in intercultural communication has the potential to promote the participants' emotional well-being as well as intercultural understanding and relationships.

Second, the participants also attempted to neutralize the adjustment obstacles they encountered by lowering expectations and setting priorities (Anderson, 1994). Specifically, they lowered expectations towards their task performances and relationship development in intercultural communication, which had the effects of releasing stress and enhancing satisfaction towards their adjustment experiences despite the difficulties or problems they encountered:

因为我的目标就只要是过了就可以，所以我觉得差不多也就行了。(E1)

Because my goal is just to pass, I don't expect a lot. (E1)

不要有过高期待，幻想着自己好像什么都能做成，做什么他们都满意……你刚到这来，就是一个 newcomer，就是来这边向他们学习的。(D2)

Don't expect too much and imagine you can handle everything or they will be satisfied with anything you do. ... You are just a newcomer as you just arrived here, so you are here to learn from them. (D2)

觉得和他们（一群英国学生）好好做朋友就好了，不要期盼太多，不要期盼那种亲密感。毕竟只交往了一年，而且又（是）不同文化不同国家人，很难变成很亲密的朋友。(I2)

I feel that it's sufficient to be friends with them (a group of British students). Don't expect too much intimacy in your friendship with them. After all, you just spent one year with them, and you are from different cultural backgrounds and countries. So it's very difficult to build close friendships with them. (I2)

The participants also set priorities in their intercultural encounters in order to make better use of their emotional energy on pursuing their key concerns around relational development and communication (detailed as follows). For one thing, they preferred to make more emotional investment in those who made them feel good (e.g. feeling valued, safe, etc.) in terms of accepting them as real friends and being willing to connect with them more:

（我）因为她把我当成真正的朋友而感动……（向人求助时）我会第一时间想到她，觉得我内心也把她当朋友了。(C2)

(I) felt touched as she treated me as a real friend ... (So when I needed help) she was the first one who came to my mind; so I felt that I did see her as a friend as well. (C2)

安全感就是如果跟他们出去玩的话不会担心安全问题，因为他们比较 protective。……（我）会更想跟他们在一起，就比较依赖。(I2)

When I hang out with them, I do not worry about security issues as they're very protective. ... (I) therefore feel more willing to stay with them and rely on them. (I2)

In contrast, they defined people whom they did not wish to put more interpersonal energy into, especially those who held prejudiced or discriminatory attitudes towards the Chinese:

你有这种思想存在：反正中国人不一样啊，是另外一个人种啦，见他们就觉得好奇怪好奇葩的，就印象不好了。那我也没有说怎么办，一定要讨好你们。我就讲礼貌一点，不影响别人，做自己就行了，别的没必要。(M2)

If someone holds opinions such as ‘the Chinese are different anyway since they belong to a different racial group’, or ‘the Chinese are really strange and weird and I dislike them’, or something like that, then I have nothing to do with them since I don’t want to please them. I just behave politely, not affecting others and be myself. That’s all. No more needs to be done. (M2)

（对那些认为中国女生 easy 的外国人）也不会太在乎，反正也跟我没什么关系，主观上我也不想再深入了解你这种感觉。(J2)

I wouldn’t care too much (about those non-Chinese who think Chinese girls are easy) as it’s none of my business anyway, and I don’t want to know them anymore. (J2)

It can be seen from all of the above that by setting out their priorities in building intercultural relationships, the participants developed a selective tendency in terms of putting more emotional energy into connecting with those who were more likely to engage in intercultural communication from a friendly and respectful stance, while investing much less in interactions with those without such an open attitude. In other words, they saved their emotional energy for promoting friendly and respectful intercultural relationships where they were more likely to occur.

Further, participants set priorities to highlight what mattered to them most in various intercultural communicative situations (e.g., staying in touch with nice people, preserving the polite image of the Chinese, etc.), which also had the effects of making better use of their emotional energy and tackling these situations more wisely:

我觉得他们是一群好人……现在我跟他们聊天（因为冷场）依然会觉得 stressful，但是我不觉得这是一个什么事情。今天跟那个烂卡聊倒不 stressful，但不代表他是好人啊。{而你觉得是不是好人是更重要的？}对。(D2)

I think they are a group of nice people ... Now I'm still stressed when chatting with them (because of awkward silences), but I don't worry about it. I don't feel stressed when chatting with that bad guy today, but he's still a bad guy no matter what. {And you feel that being a nice person is more important?} Yes. (D2)

（我心想）你不把我当回事，不尊重我，那你做的东西我不要了。当时我真的很想离开（食品店）了……后来想了想，不行，得有素质，我不能影响中国人的形象啊。有些东西没那么严重，没必要斤斤计较。(M2)

(I thought) 'You didn't take me seriously and you didn't respect me, then I didn't want to buy your food anymore.' I really wanted to leave (the food store) at that point ... After giving a second thought, I felt that I couldn't do this, as I needed to be polite and I couldn't affect the social image of the Chinese. It (this encounter) was not a big deal, so there was no need to take it too seriously. (M2)

Thus, setting priorities in intercultural interactions helped to minimize the negative effects of undesired interactional situations on the participants, such as being disturbed by these emotions and failing to concentrate on fulfilling their essential needs and goals in these interactions, thus it had a value in streamlining the participants' emotional energy usage in intercultural encounters.

In summary, by engaging in self-reflections and putting themselves in another's shoes, the participants managed to develop a more 'ethnorelative' perspective by acknowledging the importance of multiple realities in addition to their own, which had the effects of enhancing understanding and tolerating others' misunderstanding or prejudice in intercultural communication. The participants also lowered their own expectations regarding task performance and relationship development to decrease stress and boost satisfaction towards their adjustment experiences. Moreover, they set priorities with the aim of

making the best use of their emotional energy in intercultural communication. Specifically, they budgeted their emotional energy usage for promoting friendly and mutually respectful intercultural relationships and focused on their key concerns in their intercultural interactions (such as maintaining interactions with people they viewed as being nice and maintaining the polite image of the Chinese people).

### **6.2.5 Conclusions**

Four strategies were adopted by the participants as they managed their ways of thinking about the emotion eliciting events and situations in their intercultural communication: promoting open-mindedness and developing self-monitoring skills when encountering with the new sociocultural environment; guiding thoughts in more desirable directions when confronting the adjustment challenges; having confidence in intercultural encounters; and managing the perceived importance of the events or situations in intercultural communication.

The findings reveal the complexity of the participants' adjustment to the host environment, which involves, but is not restricted to, cultural learning, as issues such as managing attitudes towards cultural differences, internalizing newly developed attitudes and behaviour as one's habits (Anderson, 1994; Kim, 2005), monitoring one's behaviour and self-presentations (Chen and Starosta, 1997), promoting self-confidence (Chen and Starosta, 1997) and adjustment motivation, and managing emotional energy usage were also highlighted in the participants' responses to emotions in their intercultural encounters. The complexity also lies in the multiple adjustment outcomes achieved, including increased cultural awareness, acceptance and respect; a more adaptive and positive life attitude; enhanced self-confidence; streamlined emotional energy usage towards enhanced emotional well-being and better fulfillments of one's key concerns. Moreover, the participants' view of keeping a critical eye in terms of paying equal attention to similarities and not attributing all undesired

experiences to cultural differences suggests that there are limits in adopting a tolerant and accepting attitude in intercultural communication, which adds further complexity to the attitudinal aspect of intercultural adjustment. This picture of the processes and outcomes of the participants' intercultural adjustment adds to the existing understanding in intercultural adjustment literature. In particular, discussions regarding streamlining emotional energy usage to boost emotional well-being and to concentrate on fulfilling one's essential needs and goals, as well as the limits in being tolerant and accepting in intercultural communication, seem under-explored in the existing literature.

The findings also highlight the uniqueness of individual sojourners' intercultural adjustment experiences. The fact that not all participants felt more accepting of some aspects of the host academic culture, even after they had become familiar with the host environment, as well as the importance of pursuing one's own concerns in managing emotional energy usage in the participants' adjustment processes, suggests that sojourners' adjustment experiences are unique and personal and in which individual agency plays an essential role.

## **Chapter summary**

In this chapter I have examined how the participants managed their ways of thinking about emotion eliciting events or situations in their intercultural adjustment and communication processes in the host environment. Specifically, the participants adopted four management strategies: promoting open-mindedness and developing self-monitoring skills when encountering with the new sociocultural environment; guiding thoughts in more desirable directions when confronting the adjustment challenges; having confidence in intercultural encounters; and managing the perceived importance of the events or situations in intercultural communication. The findings shed light on the complexity of intercultural adjustment which involves various issues (including

cultural learning, attitudes and habits management, boosting adjustment motivation, promoting self-confidence, enhancing emotional well-being and managing emotional energy usage) and leads to multiple outcomes (i.e., increased cultural awareness, acceptance and respect, an adaptive and positive life attitude, enhanced self-confidence and emotional well-being, and better fulfilments of one's key concerns). In particular, the findings contribute to the existing intercultural literature by expanding discussions of the issues of streamlining emotional energy usage and taking a critical perspective (in terms of not overemphasizing differences) in intercultural communication. Moreover, intercultural adjustment is unique as the extent of adjustment varies from individual to individual and the participants managed their emotional energy usage with the aim of pursuing their key needs and goals, thus highlights the importance of individual agency in the adjustment processes.

In the next chapter, I will examine the participants' other ways of responding to emotions in their intercultural communication, including managing the emotional eliciting events or situations, coping with the emotional effects of their experiences exclusively, and avoidance.

## **Chapter 7 Responses to emotions in intercultural adjustment: Changing the environment, and other responses**

### **7.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I investigated how the participants managed their emotions in intercultural communication and adjustment by using one of the adaptive instrumental options proposed by Anderson (1994): changing the sojourners themselves so that the adjustment challenges are no longer challenges for them. Specifically, the participants did so by changing their ways of thinking about the emotion eliciting events or situations in intercultural encounters.

In this chapter, the focus of investigation shifts to examine the participants' adoption of another adaptive instrumental option: changing the environment, in terms of managing the emotion eliciting events or situations. The chapter also observes the participants' other responses to emotions, including emotion-focused coping and avoiding the emotion eliciting events or situations. As in the previous chapter, this chapter also aims to answer the second and third research questions identified in Chapter 2:

*RQ2: How do Chinese students in a UK university respond to their emotions in their intercultural adjustment processes in the host environment?*

*RQ3: What are the relevant sociocultural and historical factors that influence the development processes of these responses?*

In 7.2, the ways in which the participants managed the emotion eliciting events or situations in their intercultural encounters are discussed, including actions towards 'good' events or situations (7.2.1), and actions towards 'bad' events or situations (7.2.2). The participants' other responses to their emotions are outlined in 7.3: emotional-focused coping (7.3.1) and avoiding the emotion eliciting events or situations (7.3.2).



## **7.2 Managing emotion eliciting events or situations**

As shown in the introduction above, managing the events or situations that triggered the participants' emotions was one of Anderson's (1994) adaptive instrumental options of emotion management in intercultural encounters. Planalp (1999, p. 160) argues that individuals' understanding of their emotions involves 'a judgement of good or bad'. As will be illustrated in the following subsections, such a judgment informed the participants' usage of different sub-strategies to manage the various emotion eliciting events or situations in their intercultural encounters.

### **7.2.1 Actions towards 'good' events or situations**

The participants responded in two ways when encountering events or situations that were appraised as 'good': taking action to maintain 'good' events or situations; and taking action to create 'good' events or situations, which are elaborated as follows.

#### **Actions to maintain 'good' events or situations**

The participants undertook various actions to maintain 'good' events or situations. First, they acted reciprocally to encourage others to keep their 'good' attitudes or behaviour in their intercultural encounters. For example, they showed attentiveness as a way of reciprocating host people's interest in interacting with them:

他（一位英国男士）想跟我们交流，我们就努力地去听他想说什么，然后我们也在表达，他也在努力去听我们说什么。就这样沟通，互相尊重，这种感觉。(A2)

Since he (a British man) wanted to communicate with us, we listened carefully to what he said to us. And then we also expressed our own opinions, and he also listened carefully to what we said. This interaction left me a feeling of mutual respect. (A2)

Similarly, the participants verbally displayed gratitude as a way of reciprocating others' helping behaviour and friendliness, and they reciprocated others materially when their gratitude was strong:

你对他说感激，他会知道他的（助人）行为受到欣赏，可能也会激励他以后延续这种良好的行为。(B2)

You said thank you to him, then he would know that his (helping) behaviour was appreciated. This may encourage him to keep such good behaviour in the future. (B2)

我们三个给他们（几个英国朋友）做了十多个中国菜，然后我们都有送给他们一些小礼物，表达感动……因为感觉算一件大事吧。(E1)

We three served them (a few British friends) a meal which included more than 10 Chinese dishes cooked by ourselves, and we all sent them small gifts to express our gratitude ...

Because I felt it was a big deal. (E1)

Second, the participants also actively discovered opportunities to stabilize and enhance their emotional ties with their host friends:

她觉得我需要帮助，我就给她帮助我的平台。她帮助完了我们就会有共同的……经历的事情很多，这样羁绊就会更加强。(F2)

Since she thinks I need help, I give her opportunities to help me. So after she offers me her help, we will have more common experiences ... The bond between us will be stronger if we experienced many things together. (F2)

我会（跟这个亲密的英国朋友）讲我自己家里的事情，也会讲一些我比较亲密的事情。(D2)

I talk about my family issues as well as my private things (with a close British friend). (D2)

According to Gao and Ting-Toomey (1998), in Chinese affective communication, constant reciprocation and the involvement of others are valued and viewed as ways of repaying others. Indeed, acting reciprocally, i.e., 'if someone does something for you, you do something for her in return', is considered a basic principle of social living (Planalp, 1999, p. 153). In the participants' cases above, they followed this principle by making use of different

ways of communicating emotion (i.e., displaying interests and attentiveness, expressing gratitude verbally or materially, and involving host friends more in common social activities such as asking for the friends' help and sharing private issues) in order to promote intercultural interactions on a mutually respectful basis, to encourage others' helping behaviour and to repay their friendliness, as well as to reinforce their host friendships. These examples support Planalp's (1999) view that emotional communication serves the functions of repairing social imbalance and reinforcing social ties. As such, the participants managed to act responsively (in terms of acting reciprocally and engaging with others more) to maintain 'good' communicative and relational situations based on a respectful and friendly stance in their intercultural encounters, which may in turn enhance their potential to develop further fruitful intercultural experiences and connections.

#### Actions to create 'good' events or situations

The participants also undertook actions to create 'good' events or situations, such as integrating themselves more effectively into the host environment and forging positive friendship experiences. To being with, they followed the principle of 'when in Rome, do as the Romans do' and emphasized the importance of taking the initiative in order to feel more integrated into the host environment:

其实要想进入某一个文化圈子，还是得用他们的方式。比如说他们要喝酒的话，你如果就什么都不喝，坐在那，不好。哪怕是点一个 soft drink 都好一些。还是要入乡随俗……让人感觉我们差不多。(M1)

In fact, if you want to join a particular cultural group, you need to follow their ways of doing things. For example, if they want to drink, it would be inappropriate for you to just sit there without drinking anything. It would be better even if you just ordered a soft drink.

One still needs to do as the Romans do ... in order to make others feel that there are similarities between you and them. (M1)

我觉得要主动跟他们分享自己的事情，然后尽力地去融入他们的生活。即使你不爱干这个事情，你稍微得付出一点。你想融入他们你就得付出。(C1)

I think I need to take the initiative to share my personal things with them, and try to integrate myself into their social lives. Even if you don't like it, you have to invest a bit since you want to integrate yourself into them. (C1)

需要自己制造一些机会，我觉得他们这边的人都不会主动跟中国人讲话，除非你跟他讲话。老外虽然不会把你排在外面，但是也不会跟你深层次的交流。(M1)

You need to create some opportunities for yourself, as I feel people here do not take the initiative to talk with Chinese. You need to initiate the interactions. Although foreigners will not leave you out, they will not (take the initiative to) have in-depth communication with you. (M1)

Moreover, one participant considered copying her host friends' helping behaviour she appreciated to promote positive friendship experiences:

会让我重新定义了下朋友和朋友到底该如何交往。因为从我个人角度来看，(她为我)做了这件事之后，我无比地感动和感谢。我想如果在以后其他人需要帮助的时候帮一下，就算牺牲自己一点点东西，却帮了别人很大忙，而且别人很感激的时候，我也会这么做的。就不会像原来会想，要损失……{就是自己要损失多少是吧？}对。(F2)

This made me redefine how one should behave in friendships. From my personal point of view, I felt so touched and grateful when she (a British student) made her offer of help to me in such a way. So I think in the future I will also offer help to someone even if this means I may sacrifice a bit, as my help will mean a lot to them and they will be very grateful. I would no longer think about things such as how much loss ... {How much am I going to lose?} Yes. (F2)

As such, the strategy of adopting the host's habits, taking the initiative, and imitating host friends' helping behaviour can be viewed as the participants' social investment in order to attain more engagement with the host environment and to facilitate host friendship development. From the participants' perspective, following the host's customs and taking the initiative seem to be particularly important in an environment in which spontaneous

interactions between the host people and Chinese students are perceived as rare.

So far, I have presented the ways in which the participants maintained or created 'good' intercultural events or situations: acting reciprocally (e.g., reciprocating others' friendliness by showing attentiveness in conversations, showing gratitude for others' helping behaviour in verbal or material ways, and so on); following the host culture's customs; modelling host friends' helping behaviour; and taking the initiative in intercultural communication. By carrying out these actions, the participants hoped to maintain and reinforce desired communicative situations and interpersonal ties based on a friendly and mutually respectful stance, in order to promote a better integration into the host environment and to facilitate friendship development.

### **7.2.2 Actions towards 'bad' events or situations**

When encountering emotion eliciting events or situations perceived as 'bad', the participants may choose to change things by confronting others in threatening situations, seeking emotional support to tackle negative emotions and adjustment stress, and/or seeking clarity and reassurance in uncertain and confusing situations, which are detailed below.

First, the participants confronted those who attacked them verbally in order to punish others' unacceptable behaviour and preserve their self-esteem:

那个小孩管我叫 idiot,我当时一点都不害怕,我很淡定,回了一句 you are an idiot。……我觉得要是不反抗的话,他以后见着中国人就觉得你骂他他都不会回应的那种,他可能会产生这种想法。我就想出一下气,因为我希望他们能够得到惩罚,而不是做过恶作剧之后什么事没有,他们以后会更加嚣张。(E1)

The kid called me 'idiot'. I was very calm and not scared at all. I responded 'You are an idiot.' to him. ... If I didn't fight back, he might get the idea that it's OK to curse the Chinese since they wouldn't have any responses to this. I just wished to express my anger, as I wanted them to be punished after doing such kind of prank. Otherwise they will become more aggressive in the future. (E1)

有两个外国女生对我喊 ‘Hello, yellow!’ 我就回骂了一句 ‘Be careful about your words, bitch!’ 然后就走了……这是种族歧视……啊气死我了！……人不犯我，我不犯人，人若犯我，我必犯人。(M2)

Those two foreign girls shouted ‘Hello, yellow!’ to me. So I cursed back: ‘Be careful about your words, bitch!’ and then walked away. ... That was racial discrimination. ... Ah, I’m so furious! ... Tit for tat is fair play. (M2)

According to Planalp (1999), the feeling of anger may be served as a sign of individuals’ experience of injustice which motivates them to take action to set things right. In the participants’ cases, their anger triggered by others’ curses or perceived discrimination urged them to be confrontational (i.e., using curse words in retaliation) in order to warn others of their misconduct and to defend their self-esteem. M actually shared her story of confronting the two non-Chinese girls with some Chinese students in the research field immediately after it took place. She mentioned that she was actually very fearful and thus walked away quickly after retaliating against the two girls in order to protect her personal safety from being threatened. Hence, it seems that M did view her confrontational response as essential in such a situation, as she did so despite her great concern of being attacked more seriously. As such, these examples challenge some authors’ (e.g., Chen, 2002; Chuang and Hale, 2002) views that the Chinese prefer to use strategies such as avoidance, non-confrontation, and integration rather than confrontation when encountering interpersonal conflicts with a view to preserving interpersonal harmony. In the cases shown above, the participants not only confronted others but also valued such confrontational behaviour. It would therefore be problematic to claim that using a non-confrontational strategy to preserve interpersonal harmony is preferred by the Chinese when dealing with conflict, as this pre-defined position cannot yield reasonable insights into the participants’ action tendencies in intercultural conflict situations. In this context, such a claim is therefore misleading.

Second, the participants seek emotional support with the aim of releasing negative emotions and academic stress. Often they would like to resort to their Chinese peers for such support:

出国就可能会经常遇到一些不开心的事情，但是我觉得要是跟我的中国朋友在一起就比较宽心吧……会找他们诉苦呀什么的，因为大家可能都会有相同的感受吧。(K1)

One may often encounter unpleasant things when studying abroad, but I feel relieved when staying with my Chinese friends ... I complain with them, as we may share the same feelings. (K1)

……释放（学业）压力嘛，真的不吐不快，因为自己憋的太压抑了，很想说出来，大家（其他中国同学）分担一下……因为大家跟我一样亚历山大，都很担心，就好一点了。

(M2)

... (in order) to release the (academic) pressure. I really want to express it as I am so depressed. I wish to talk with others (Chinese students who are my peers) who can share my feelings ... I then get to know that others are as stressed and worried as I am, which makes me feel a bit better. (M2)

From the above accounts, it is clear that the participants seemed to be selective when choosing to whom they wished to resort for emotional support. In particular, they felt that it was easy to gain understanding and empathy from their Chinese peers who encountered similar emotional situations (such as experiencing difficulties and academic stress during their study abroad period) and therefore shared adjustment experiences and feelings with the participants. Similarly to the relevant findings and discussions in Chapter 4 (see 4.2.1), such a preference again reflects the effects of emotional coincidence on the participants' adjustment experiences. That is, responding to similar intercultural events may lead to emotional coincidence between the participants and their Chinese peers, which in turn positions these peers as ideal candidates to provide emotional support.

The participants' selective tendency was also reflected in their preference to turn to their intimate others, such as close friends, parents, and/or partners, for emotional support:

我找朋友吃饭。但是就只是跟比较亲密的人，大家都熟悉自己最近的状况，可以比较深入地去交谈，不需要很泛泛的去谈这种感觉。(C2)

I have meals with friends, but only with those intimate ones who are familiar with my latest situations. Hence, I can have in-depth interactions and no small talk is needed. (C2)

我会跟爹妈呀聊聊天那种，他们就会非常鼓励，给你非常非常大的支持……有时候给男朋友打下电话。(K1)

I sometimes chat with parents, who are very encouraging as well as very, very supportive ... Sometimes I call my boyfriend as well. (K1)

我会跟妈妈用微信聊天……哇，听见妈妈的声音，妈妈等我回家，妈妈对我期望好高，我一定要好好努力。(M2)

I sometimes chat with mum via WeChat (N.B., a mobile text and voice messaging communication service which is popular in China) ... Wow, when I hear mum's voice, knowing that she's waiting for me to be back home on time and has very high expectations on me, I make up my mind that I must study hard. (M2)

我会跟家人朋友多联系……（这样）让我觉得没有那么孤单了。(G2)

I get in touch with family members and friends more ... This makes me feel not so lonely. (G2)

As illustrated in these examples, the participants preferred to seek intimate others for two reasons. First, these people tended to be familiar with the participants' personal situations which facilitated private and in-depth interactions. Second, these people also cared more about the participants' learning success in the UK and were therefore more sensitive to the participants' emotional challenges encountered during their study abroad period. As a result,



intimate others were perceived as more capable of and relevant to supporting the participants emotionally.

Not all the participants found chatting with their parents to be desirable, however, as explained by one participant:

我曾经尝试过找爸妈……有一次我跟他们说我很烦，后来这个烦的情绪过了嘛，过了几天我又跟他们说另外一件事，他（爸爸）就跟我说，你别烦，我这几天睡不好觉。我就觉得心里特别难受，我就只是一说，还搞得睡不着觉，这何必呢，你又帮不了我解决……听了之后还要给他们添堵。他一说睡不着觉那我就更难受了，就觉得那还不如不说了。(C2)

I used to resort to my parents ... Once, I told them that I felt sick. A few days later when my sick feeling faded, I talked about another thing with them. But he (my dad) replied: 'Don't bother me. I can't sleep well these days.' I felt very sick when I heard this. I just wished to release the sick feeling which was not that serious, and I didn't expect that this would make them not sleep well. They can't help me to solve the problems anyway... Moreover, listening to my complaints made them feel sick. So I felt even worse when he said he can't sleep well. Then I realized that it was better not to share my negative feelings with them. (C2)

The above account indicates that the participant did not wish to gain emotional comfort at the expense of sacrificing her parents' emotional welfare; by worrying her parents, she was in fact losing emotional support. As a result, given her previous negative experience of seeking emotional support from her parents, she decided to stop resorting to parents because of her anticipation of bringing too much of an emotional burden on them, a danger of seeking emotional support from intimate others as discussed in Planalp's (1999) work. This account therefore suggests the complexity of the participants' tendency to seek emotional support from others because such a strategy has its limitations. That is, 'talking with others about your emotions ... will not necessarily improve your well-being' (Planalp, 1999, p. 117). Hence, developing a more comprehensive and critical understanding of the participants' affective

intercultural adjustments calls for closer attention to the individual uniqueness and contextual specificities of each case under investigation.

Finally, the participants seek clarification and reassurance in uncertain and misconstrued situations with the aims of gaining assurance, enhancing understanding, and softening the undesired emotional atmosphere of certain interactions:

和他们再确定一下这件事情的细节，会让我自己心里面更确定一点吧。如果别人只是说我们今天出去玩，我可能完全不知道接下来会发生什么事情，或者比如我回来有没有同学陪我呀。如果我确定一下，就觉得心里很放心吧。(H2)

I double checked the details of this event with them to make myself feel a bit more certain about it. If I just knew I was going to hang out with them, I would have no idea about what was going to happen afterwards, or things like if there were anyone who would go back home with me. I felt more relieved if I got answers about these questions. (H2)

他说 ‘Ah, you must enjoy more freedom here.’ 当时我就震惊了……（再来一次的话）我会具体问他你指的是哪方面的 freedom，这样的话他就会举例啊，我们之间那种气氛可能也会比较软化，活跃……我觉得这样聊天就会比较好。{你是不是觉得这样就更像是在讨论什么了？}对对，而不是在 argue。(D2)

He said ‘Ah, you must enjoy more freedom here.’, and I was shocked ... (If I were in that situation again) I will ask him which freedom he refers to, so he will explain it by giving examples, hence the interactional atmosphere between us will also be softened and become more active ... I feel this way of chatting is better. {Do you feel that in this way, it seems that you two are discussing about something?} Yes, discussing rather than arguing. (D2)

Moreover, the participants believed that, in situations related to intercultural misunderstanding, their attempts to seek clarification could be highly discouraged if other people in the interactions stuck to their own opinions:

他（一个美国学生）也算是对（中国）文化有一点质疑吧……他在听我说，再和我交流，解除他（对文化）的迷惑或者是怎么样，我觉得这个才是交流的目的……（但是）因为他确实完全没有在意我的答案这回事，所以我就懒得回应他了。(H1)

He (an American student) seemed to have some queries about the (Chinese) cultures ... I feel the aim of communication is that he listens to me, then interacts with me, and then his confusions (about the cultures) are removed... (But) because he didn't care about my answers *at all*, I was not bothered to respond to him anymore. (H1)

我说 now China has become more and more open, 但他居然还是举了个反例, 说 'Yeah, I know China has become more and more open, but you still need to get a visa to get around right? So still very difficult to go abroad.....But here (in the UK), you just need to get a ticket.' {Get a ticket 去哪里呢? } 到国外啊, (他意思是在英国) 你 (出国) 不用办 visa。说实话我真挺无语的, 想说你到中国试试看, 要不要办 visa..... (但是) 我不想再多解释什么, 说实话。我觉得 argument 只能让他更坚持自己的想法, 或者会有更多的 stereotype, 就是中国人被 brain wash 了。 (D2)

I said 'Now China has become more and more open', but he raised an opposite example as a response: 'Yeah, I know China has become more and more open, but you still need to get a visa to get around right? So still very difficult to go abroad ... But here (in the UK), you just need to get a ticket.' {To get a ticket to go where?} To go abroad. (He meant that in the UK) you don't need to get a visa (to go abroad). I was really speechless to be honest, as I could tell him 'You could have a try to go to China and see if you need a visa or not.'... (But) I didn't want to explain anymore, to be honest. I think arguing with him would only make him to stick to his ideas more, or lead to more stereotypes about the Chinese, that is, Chinese people are brainwashed. (D2)

These comments highlight the perspective that intercultural understanding cannot be achieved if one person sticks rigidly to his or her (dis)beliefs about other cultures in intercultural communication, thus echoes Byram's (1997) argument that a readiness to suspend one's belief about his or her own culture and disbelief concerning other cultures is the very basis of successful intercultural interactions. As shown above, failing to do so would largely discourage the participants' willingness to clarify cultural misunderstandings or even lead to a termination of the conversations. Hence, it seems that this ready attitude to suspend previous opinions from *both* sides of the interaction is

fundamental to promoting intercultural understanding; it therefore again emphasizes the importance of emotional coincidence in terms of being open-minded for productive intercultural communication. As such, the effects of interpersonal factors (such as others' affective responses) on individual sojourners' action tendencies in their intercultural encounters cannot be overlooked.

In this subsection, I have explored the ways in which the participants dealt with emotion eliciting events or situations perceived as 'bad'. Specifically, they confronted others in situations they saw as unjust, sought emotional support to cope with negative emotions and academic stress, and pursued clarity and reassurance in ambiguous or misunderstood situations. The findings challenge the view that the Chinese prefer to avoid confrontation for the sake of preserving interpersonal harmony. They also illustrate the participants' selective tendency regarding whom they chose to resort to for emotional support, as many participants seemed to prefer to turn to their Chinese peers and intimate others to gain empathy, care, or to ensure the occurrence of in-depth and private interactions. Not all the participants, however, chose to resort to their parents due to the concern that they would be too much of an emotional burden to their parents. Moreover, interpersonal factors, such as if others held an open attitude during the interaction process, could strongly influence the participants' attempts to seek clarification in ambiguous intercultural situations.

### **7.2.3 Conclusions**

My exploration of how the participants managed the emotion eliciting events or situations in their intercultural encounters highlights the important role emotions play in directing the participants' adjustment orientations. Planalp (1999, p. 161) argues that 'emotion orients us to the good ... to things that we value'. In the participants' cases, it was the judgement of 'good' or 'bad' based on their appraisals of emotions that guided their various intercultural adjustment choices: they aimed to maintain or create the perceived 'good'

events or situations, while simultaneously trying to eliminate the 'bad' ones. As such, emotion management is essential in intercultural adjustment. The fact that the participants' emotion management actions influenced or changed the intercultural events or situations they encountered further suggests the active role the participants play, as well as the dynamic and interactive characters of intercultural adjustment (Anderson, 1994). That is, intercultural adjustment is not a process in which individual sojourners simply assimilate themselves into the demands of the host environment; it is a choice-making process based on the sojourners' own judgements about their intercultural experiences, which in turn brings about influences and changes to the host environment.

Moreover, it is clear that the participants' emotion management attempts have multiple focuses and goals. The participants not only coped with problematic intercultural experiences in order to neutralize the adjustment challenges they confronted, but they also amplified the promising intercultural events or situations to capture the opportunities that led towards better adjustment outcomes. In other words, in addition to dealing with the adjustment obstacles, intercultural adjustment also involves making the most of the adjustment facilitators, a point which does not seem to have been made explicit in the existing intercultural literature.

Furthermore, the findings regarding the essential effects of others' affective responses on the participants' adjustment behaviour (for example, the fear of offloading too much of an emotional burden onto others prevented one participant from seeking further emotional support from her parents; or others' indifferent attitude discouraged the participants' attempts to seek further clarification in intercultural misunderstanding situations), as well as the participants' decision to confront others' misconduct, rather than preserving interpersonal harmony which is viewed by some authors (e.g., Chen, 2002; Chuang and Hale, 2002) as the Chinese preferred strategy in dealing with conflict, indicate that intercultural adjustment phenomenon cannot be soundly interpreted by drawing on pre-defined frameworks while neglecting the

influences of relevant interpersonal factors (e.g., emotional coincidence in interpersonal communication) or power issues (e.g., racial discrimination) on individual sojourners' adjustment actions.

Having explored the participants' methods of managing the emotion eliciting events or situations, in the next section I move on to investigate their adoption of other ways of managing emotions in their intercultural encounters.

### **7.3 Other responses**

In addition to adopting Anderson's (1994) two adaptive instrumental strategies of managing emotions in intercultural communication, in some situations the participants also responded to their emotions by coping exclusively with the emotional effects of their intercultural encounters or by avoiding the emotion eliciting events or situations. These two strategies are discussed as follows.

#### **7.3.1 Emotion-focused Coping (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984)**

In certain intercultural events or situations, the participants did not undertake any action to change the environment or themselves, but accepted the events or situations as they were and managed their psychological effects exclusively, a strategy termed emotion-focused coping (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Such a strategy was adopted for various reasons. First, attempts to change the environment or oneself may be perceived as futile, especially in situations regarding the undesired changes of relational depth in interpersonal connections. For example, the participants reckoned that interpersonal relationships needed to follow their own contours when reflecting on the development trajectory of their friendships with host students:

感情这东西是一厢情愿是改变不了的……是不能勉强的。(E2)

Emotional ties can't be promoted solely by the efforts from one side ... It cannot be pursued on purpose. (E2)

当时的话可能会有一种无力感，到底要怎么跟人交往才正确之类的，但是后来也没有想太多了……我这种性格真的是有的人会很喜欢，有的人就会不喜欢，那你也没有办法啊……也作不了什么事能够改变啊。(I2)

I may feel impotent at that point, wondering about issues such as how to connect with others in the right way. But later I just left it ... Some people really like my personality, and others just dislike it. You have nothing to do to all of this ... You can do nothing to change it. (I2)

The above accounts reflect the thinking of an important concept in Chinese culture: *yuan* (缘), which refers to ‘the condition that allows results to come to fruition’ (Fang, 1990, p. 153, cited in Chang, 2002). Originally derived from Buddhism, the concept of *yuan* emphasizes the importance of the interplay between multiple causes on producing events, and the view that the disintegration of these causes may lead to an end of *yuan* as well as a decreased relational depth in interpersonal relationships. In such situations, one has to let things go despite reluctance (Chang, 2002), which was exactly what the participants did in the above examples. By realizing that satisfactory emotional ties was the result of joint efforts from both sides of the relationship and that it was impossible to get everyone to like them, the participants emphasized the importance of not over-acting when pursuing friendships, as doing so would likely produce no real change; therefore, all they needed to do was to accept the situation and leave it. In her daily life, the participant I performed very actively and made many host friends in the hall of residence under study. However, in one occasion she sought for my advice about whether she should show her willingness to join a get-together event organized by a group of host students who lived in the same corridor with her, given the fact that she was not invited. She told me that she felt struggle because she was concerned about imposing her willingness to those students who may actually feel reluctant to let her join, which to her was not a desirable way of connecting with those students. Thus, it seems that on the one hand the participant I was very active

in discovering potential opportunities to promote host connections, while on the other hand she took the principle of not over-acting very seriously and valued reciprocity in interpersonal relationships highly. Such an attitude indicates the prevalent emotional perspective on interpersonal relationships in the Chinese culture, i.e., since nothing is permanent in the world, one needs to cherish and make the most of the relationships with others when the 'right' opportunity arises, and yet to respect uncontrollable life changes (Chang, 2002) and to refrain from taking futile action against such changes. By adopting such an attitude, the participants appeared – to some extent at least, as suggested by the above accounts– to overcome the emotional loss brought about by a decreased relational depth in their intercultural friendships.

Second, in certain interpersonal conflict situations the participants had to turn to emotion-focused coping because actions aimed at changing the situation may be viewed as inappropriate. For example, instead of seeking others' support, one participant chose to release her depressed feelings provoked by the conflict-based situations outright, in ways that no one else would see or hear; she explained the reasons for such a choice:

人总是会有不那么幸运的时候遇见那么两个极品，但是这种环境把你们两个划到一块去了，你又不得不面对。我确实一直因为这事情很郁闷……关键是，我又觉得大家都是后认识的，又不好跟别人去说这件事情，所以我一直都是一个人去承受。……曾经我郁闷到一个人在寝室就哭。(E1)

Sometimes you were not that lucky and you encountered a few annoying people. You had to face them as you stayed in the same environment. I did feel very depressed because of this ... The point is, I felt that since I just got to know others around very recently, it was not that appropriate to talk about such a thing with them. So I had always kept it to myself. ... I used to be so depressed that I cried alone in my own room. (E1)

This account illustrates that the participants may adopt a very careful attitude when managing their emotions in interpersonal conflicts. As the participant viewed such experiences as private and sensitive, she did not wish to disclose her emotions openly to others due to the immature rapport and lack of trust



that existed between them. Indeed, choosing to talk about one's emotions with others risks violating 'a social norm against inappropriate emotional self-disclosure' or 'having private information revealed to others' (Planalp, 1999, p. 117), thereby raising the dilemma of individuals finding appropriate ways to talk about their emotions and the target of such talks (Planalp, 1999). Gao et al. (1996, p. 290) argue that, in Chinese communication, private information is disclosed only 'to those with whom trust has been established and proven' due to the concern of potential public gossip. Such a limit in emotional self-disclosure made the participant feel unable to seek appropriate support at the time and all she felt able to do was endure the situation by trying to release her feelings in a private way. Thus, the cultural constraints on appropriate emotional self-disclosure restricted the coping strategy alternatives available to the participant, which may raise great emotional challenges to her.

In sum, as illustrated above, the participants may adopt the emotion-focused coping strategy when other options, such as changing the environment or oneself, were perceived to be either useless or inappropriate. Although the actual effects of such a strategy were not always desirable or satisfactory (such as when the participants had to accept the undesired changes to the relational depth in their intercultural friendships despite their reluctance or their need to endure the interpersonal conflict situations for a long period of time), this strategy was the only method that the certain participants could resort to when no alternative effective or appropriate options were available before they were emotionally overwhelmed by their undesired intercultural experiences; hence it had value in facilitating the participants' affective intercultural adjustments.

### **7.3.2 Avoiding the emotion eliciting events or situations**

In addition to emotion-focused coping, the participants also avoided encountering certain intercultural events or situations for different reasons: to escape from insecure situations; and to avoid embarrassing or isolating

encounters caused by inadequate intercultural interactions, which are discussed in detail below.

First, the participants chose avoidance in order to escape from perceived insecure situations, such as certain discordant teacher-student situations in which the participants felt afraid of their teachers' attitudes and behaviour, or situations in which potential threats to the participants' personal safety were detected. In the former case, a participant retreated from explaining the reason for her late submission of an essay because she feared a repetition of her teacher's harsh reaction towards her late submission (detailed in the 'Valuing approval in interactions with the host environment' subsection in Chapter 4):

我不想跟他解释了……我真的是对他有害怕的心理，我不想再跟他（说话）……(G1)

I don't want to explain to him anymore... I was really afraid of him. I don't want to (talk with him) anymore ... (G1)

In the latter case, a participant viewed protecting her own safety as the priority in potentially dangerous situations (such as encountering a group of teenagers); she therefore chose to escape:

我见到（潜在的威胁）就赶紧逃跑，特别是成群的男孩子……如果能避免的话当然是避免了，跟 teenager 爆发矛盾你吃力不讨好……因为（我）是女孩子，没办法像人家那种壮大胆子不怕困难啊。没办法的。(C2)

I run away immediately whenever I feel it (the potential threat), especially when encountering groups of boys ... Of course I choose to avoid them if I can. Because I'm not in an advantageous position in conflict situations with teenagers ... Because I'm a girl, I'm not able to be harsh enough to confront any tough situations. I have no other better choice. (C2)

These examples reflect the disadvantageous position of the participants in certain intercultural situations and its effect on their emotion management strategies. Planalp (1999) argues that people with less power may confront difficult situations with more emotional restraint. In the participants' cases, the fact that their intercultural encounters took place in the context of power imbalanced relationships (i.e., the staff-student relationship or the relationship

between an isolated girl and a group of male teenagers) made them feel emotionally disadvantaged and as though they had no other choice but to retreat. These examples therefore suggest that intercultural encounters do not occur in a social vacuum, as the effects of power on restricting the adjustment choices available to the participants cannot be overlooked.

Second, the participants also avoided encountering certain events or situations when feelings of embarrassment or isolation triggered by a lack of interaction between themselves and non-Chinese people were anticipated:

这个是我在跟外国人交流中经常会遇到的：有时候语言描述有一点困难，或者大家都没什么话聊的时候，还是会有一点尴尬的……我就会不怎么想跟不太熟的外国人接触了，（因为）没话说，然后等一下就太尴尬了……很少交的比较 close 的，就大家只是打个招呼那样子的。……因为我性格就那样，比较内向一点，也不怎么喜欢没话拼命去讲话，我觉得这样不 comfortable。（G2）

I often encounter such situations when communicating with foreigners: feeling a bit embarrassed when confronting difficulties in expressing in English or finding about conversation topics ... I therefore do not wish to make contact with foreigners who I'm not familiar with, (as) it would be too embarrassing when encountering awkward silences ... I rarely make any close foreign friends, and I just know some and say hello to each other when we meet.... Because I'm just like that: a little bit introvert, and I don't feel like talking simply for its own sake which would make me feel uncomfortable. (G2)

{不知道你是不是经常参加学校的社交活动？}不是……（因为）融不进去……身边如果没有外国朋友的话就肯定不会去呀，（因为）就一群（中国）人自己跟自己玩……很没意思……社交活动（的意义）就（是）交新的朋友……如果你一群中国人只跟中国人玩，外国人怎么跟你走进去，他根本就听不懂你在讲什么，他不会走近你的。所以最后从头到尾就是自己人跟自己人玩，失去了去社交的意义，觉得很孤独，被抛弃了的感觉。（C1）

{Do you often participate in university's social activities?} No ... (Because) I feel cannot integrate myself into those situations ... I surely wouldn't go if there's no foreign friend with me (as) it will turn out that a group of (Chinese) people staying together without any

contact with others ... This will be very boring ... The meaning of participating in social events is to make new friends ... If you only stay within the Chinese group, then it will be impossible for foreigners to approach you as he could not understand what you are talking about. So it will turn out to be that a group of Chinese playing with each other, which loses the meaning of socializing. I would feel very lonely and being abandoned in such cases. (C1)

These accounts reveal the participants' withdrawal tendency regarding anticipated negative emotions in intercultural communication. That is, they were unwilling to communicate with unfamiliar non-Chinese people to avoid the embarrassment followed by awkward silences, or to participate in host social events without the company of non-Chinese friends so that they would not feel left out in such occasions. The reasons for such a withdrawal tendency vary. The first example suggests that the participant's personality and value orientation may influence her ways of managing emotions in intercultural communication. As she was less talkative in interactional situations due to her introvert personality and unwillingness to talk simply for its own sake, it seems that the only way to manage embarrassment elicited by awkward silences was to avoid such interactional situations. This example therefore demonstrates the challenges of managing emotions to facilitate intercultural contact, as people may be unwilling to change their habits of dealing with the world, 'even if they are not always pleasant or effective' (Planalp, 1999, p. 86). The second example, on the other hand, illustrates the restrictive effects of a large proportion of Chinese students on the participants' engagements in the host social events. That is, a large Chinese group forms a bubble which may discourage others to join in and prevent the occurrence of interactions between the participant and other non-Chinese people at the event, thereby further dampening the participants' motivation to join the host events. Indeed, such a phenomenon was not uncommon in host social events in the research field (such as formal dinner) in which a large group of Chinese students stayed together with very little interaction with others. As revealed in my own conversations with some

non-Chinese students in the research field, the presence of a large Chinese group and Chinese students' close contact with each other also contributed to the development of a general impression of Chinese students' reluctance to engage in intercultural interactions, which in turn may further discourage the occurrence of interactions between Chinese and non-Chinese students as well as the participants' willingness of getting involved in the host events. Therefore, the participants' avoidance tendency can be reinforced by individual agency, such as the participants' personality and life attitude, as well as contextual factors including the presence of a large number of Chinese students, which jointly hampered their potential to expand their intercultural network. As such, the drawbacks of adopting an avoidance strategy lie in the fact that it prohibits the participants from exploring other alternative ways of managing their emotions which may bring about more productive intercultural adjustment outcomes.

In this subsection, I have explored the participants' adoption of the avoidance strategy when responding to certain emotion eliciting events or situations, which was driven by two reasons. First, the participants chose avoidance with a view to escaping from insecure situations regarding conflicts (either real or anticipated) with academic staffs or local teenagers. Second, they avoided the potentially embarrassing or isolating intercultural situations caused by an anticipated lack of interactions between themselves and non-Chinese students, which further restricted their potential to explore other responding strategies and their development of a wider intercultural network. The findings in this subsection highlight the essential influences of a variety of personal (such as personality and individuals' value orientation), structural (such as power imbalance between staff and students, male and female, and group and individual), and situational (such as the presence of a large group of Chinese people) factors on the participants' choice of the avoidance strategy.

### **7.3.3 Conclusions**

In this section, I discuss the participants' use of other emotion management strategies in addition to the two adaptive instrumental ones previously presented. The participants chose either to cope with the emotional effects of certain intercultural friendships or conflict-based experiences without changing the objective situations of such experiences or their understanding of the situations, or to avoid certain insecure situations or situations in which feelings of embarrassment or isolation triggered by lack of intercultural interaction were anticipated.

Such findings show the complexity of intercultural adjustment, in that 'not everyone who undergoes an intercultural experience achieves a quantum leap in learning and skills or in personal growth' (Anderson, 1994, p. 321); the participants' previously acquired perspectives and norms related to emotions and emotional communication may be a reason for this phenomenon. For instance, the perspective of respecting undesirable but inevitable changes in the relational depth of interpersonal relationships discouraged the participants' tendency to overreact in their intercultural friendships; and the decision to disclose no private information to others instantly restricted the coping alternatives available to the participants in certain interpersonal conflict-based situations. This again highlights the importance of emotion management in shaping individual sojourners' adjustment experiences; in fact, a real-life picture of intercultural adjustment phenomenon may not be acquired without examining the effects of emotions.

Furthermore, as the participants' avoidance tendency was influenced by various conditional factors (detailed in 7.3.2), the findings in this section again emphasise the dynamics of individual sojourners' adjustment behaviour. That is, the behaviour is the joint outcome of the interactions between individual agency and the features of relevant sociocultural and ideological contexts.

## **Chapter summary**

In this chapter I have investigated the ways in which the participants managed the emotion eliciting events or situations, as well as their alternative responses to emotions, in intercultural encounters. Based on their own judgements of 'good' or 'bad', the participants maintained or created 'good' intercultural events or situations, while eliminating the 'bad' ones. In certain intercultural friendships or conflict-based situations, the participants adopted the strategy of coping with the emotional effects of their intercultural experiences exclusively without changing the situations or their thinking about the situations. They also chose an avoidance tactic in perceived insecure situations or in situations in which a lack of intercultural interactions which could lead to a feeling of embarrassment or social isolation was anticipated. The findings highlight the important roles of emotion management in informing and influencing the participants' intercultural adjustment choices. The findings also illustrate the multiple focuses and aims of the participants' adjustment attempts, i.e., dealing with adjustment challenges, as well as amplifying opportunities, which seems to be neglected in existing intercultural literature. Moreover, the fact that the participants' adjustment experiences were influenced by a variety of personal (e.g., personality), interpersonal (e.g., emotional coincidence), situational (e.g., the presence of a large group of Chinese students), and structural (e.g., power imbalanced relationships, racial discrimination) factors and issues sheds light on the dynamics of individuals' intercultural adjustments.

In the next chapter, I will summarise and further discuss the main findings of this study, outline the thesis' theoretical, methodological, and social implications, and suggest directions for future research.

## **Chapter 8 Conclusions**

### **8.1 Introduction**

In this chapter, the last chapter of this thesis, my study concludes with the following six sections. First, I summarise the main findings of the thesis in order to answer the research questions of this study (8.2). Second, I outline the theoretical contributions and implications of my study (8.3). Third, methodological implications are presented and discussed (8.4). Fourth, I explore the social implications of my study (8.5). Fifth, the limitations of this study are discussed (8.6). Finally, I present the directions for future research (8.7).

### **8.2 Summary of main findings and contributions to knowledge**

The present research is an ethnographic study focused on exploring how Chinese students in a UK university understand and respond to their emotions in their intercultural adjustment processes. Three research questions were raised in order to investigate such a focus. The data suggest that the participant group shared some emotional experiences; however, the uniqueness of the participants' constructions of and responses to emotions was also highlighted. In the following paragraphs, I will summarise the key findings that answer the three research questions of this study respectively.

*RQ1: How do Chinese students in a UK university construct their understanding of emotions in their intercultural adjustment processes in the host environment?*

The data in Chapters 4 and 5 suggest that the participants' constructions of emotions were centred on three aspects: a) encountering and engaging with the host environment; b) performing academic and social tasks; and c) developing interpersonal relationships.



In regard to the first aspect, when encountering and engaging with the host environment the participants were eager to connect with people and valued the approval of others. Specifically, they sought host connections in order to gain academic support and to develop a more informed understanding of the host environment as a means of releasing academic adjustment pressure and feelings of insecurity that emerged while encountering a new environment. These findings highlight the significance of the emotional benefits of host communication, an under-explored area in previous studies (e.g., Bochner et al., 1977; Kim, 2005; Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006). Many of the participants also displayed a preference for the integrationist strategies, which is elaborated by Ward et al. (2001, p. 112) as the 'preferences for retaining their cultural identities while sustaining good relationships with members of the dominant culture', as they showed a willingness to maintain contact with both host people and their Chinese compatriots in the host environment. Such a preference sheds light on the restrictions of an assimilative view of intercultural adjustment, which aims to achieve in intercultural adjustment 'a state of the maximum possible convergence of strangers' internal and external conditions to those of the native' (Kim, 2005, p. 383); the findings in this study show that such a view cannot adequately interpret the participants' adjustment orientations. The findings also shed light on the complex effects of the large proportion of Chinese students on the participants' affective intercultural adjustment experiences. On the one hand, they felt restricted by the Chinese group which limited their opportunities and freedom to participate fully in host communication; on the other hand, they also enjoyed staying within the Chinese group due to its unique benefits of boosting emotional well-being in their adjustment journey. Hence, compared to Spencer-Oatey and Xiong's (2006) study about Chinese international students in which the participants viewed the presence of large Chinese groups mainly as undesirable and a disadvantage to their intercultural experiences, the findings in this study suggest that the participants' close contact with other Chinese students and lack of host

connection was their own choice after balancing their competing emotional needs regarding connecting with various people in the host environment, thus highlights the significance of emotions in shaping the participants' adjustment choices. Moreover, a sense of approval was valued by many of the participants in their intercultural interactions in terms of valuing cultural diversities – by treating people equally and respecting different beliefs and lifestyles – in order to promote inclusive, mutually understanding, and respectful intercultural relations. Some participants' problematic encounters with the academic staff, on the other hand, suggest the important role academic staff play in showing approval (in terms of acceptance and empathy) towards their students in the face of the difficulties the host academic environment imposes upon them.

As to the second aspect, the participants pursued the performance of academic and social tasks effectively (e.g., by making oneself understood in conversations, reaching a common point, and convincing others of one's perspective in group discussions); appropriately (e.g., through the appropriate usage of host language manners); and in a relaxed state of mind, all of which was perceived to be a challenging job. In particular, the participants' experience of intense academic stress indicates their strong desire to succeed in academic assessments in order to secure their taught Masters degrees, thereby highlighting the instrumental focus and selectiveness of their intercultural adjustment attempts, a point raised in Turner's (2006) study about Chinese taught Masters students in the UK. Many of the participants were also concerned with their positive self-presentation being threatened in the classroom context due to others' negative comments regarding their classroom discussion performance. Such a concern was the product of the participants' previous socialization in Chinese schools, and it strongly discouraged the participants' attempts to engage in classroom discussions fully and freely. Intercultural adjustment therefore calls for the suspension of one's previously acquired values and beliefs in order to better accommodate adjustment demands. This was a challenging task for certain participants, as their reluctance

to participate in classroom discussions persisted due to the overall inactive classroom atmosphere. Some other participants, however, managed to overcome their reticence with the help of the encouraging messages they received from interactions with lecturers and fellow students. Such diverse adjustment outcomes suggest the uniqueness of Chinese students' academic adjustment experiences.

When it comes to the third aspect, the participants valued intimacy and sincerity as they developed their intercultural relationships. In some participants' cases, their constructions of intimacy in close intercultural friendships were underpinned by open self-disclosure and shared individual characteristics, a finding that was previously reported in some studies (e.g., Kudo and Simkin, 2003; Sudweeks et al., 1990). This finding also suggests that in the context of close intercultural friendships, the participants' constructions of intimacy were centred on interpersonal rather than intergroup aspects of relationship development. For some participants, this in turn led to the development of an intercultural perspective that placed more value on treating people as individuals and discouraged the presumption of pre-existing differences. In other words, some participants developed an individualized self–other orientation that emphasized 'see[ing] oneself and others on the basis of unique individual qualities' rather than 'being restricted by categories of social grouping' (Kim, 2005, p. 392). On the other hand, the participants' understanding of sincerity was more focused on appreciating friendly actions than friendly verbal expressions, a moral orientation highlighted in Chinese affective communication (Gao and Ting-Toomey, 1998). Compared with the participants' constructions of intimacy in their close intercultural friendships, which are centred on interpersonal issues, their constructions of sincerity were embedded in specific moral standards and cultural values. In other words, both intergroup and interpersonal issues underpin the participants' construction of their emotions in the intercultural relationship context, a point omitted from previous studies.

*RQ2: How do they respond to their emotions in their intercultural adjustment processes in the host environment?*

The data in Chapters 6 and 7 represent the participants' various ways of responding to their emotions in intercultural communication and adjustment: a) changing oneself; b) changing the environment; and c) other responses, including emotion-focused coping (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984, cited in Anderson, 1994) and the avoidance of emotion eliciting events or situations.

The participants changed themselves by managing their ways of thinking about emotion eliciting events or situations. They did so in four specific ways: promoting open-mindedness and developing self-monitoring skills when encountering a new environment; guiding thoughts towards more desirable directions when confronting adjustment challenges; having confidence in intercultural encounters; and managing the perceived importance of the events or situations in intercultural communication. These emotion management strategies highlight the demanding nature of intercultural adjustment, which involves, but is not limited to, cultural learning. That is, issues such as attitude and habit management, boosting adjustment motivation, promoting self-confidence, and managing emotional energy usage also play important roles in the participants' management of their own thinking about their emotions in intercultural communication. The data also highlight the uniqueness of the participants' emotion management experiences because the extent of the change in the ways of thinking varies from individual to individual. Moreover, the findings in Chapter 6 also indicate that the participants attempted to manage their emotional energy usage with a view to fulfilling their priorities in intercultural communication, such as maintaining interactions with people they considered to be nice and upholding the polite image of the Chinese people. Discussions of this adjustment strategy and its value are missing from the existing intercultural literature.

The participants also changed the environment by managing emotion eliciting events or situations. Based on their own judgement of 'good' and 'bad' –

assigned through the appraisal of their emotions in intercultural encounters – the participants undertook various actions in order to maintain or create these perceived ‘good’ events or situations, and to eliminate the ‘bad’ ones. The data therefore indicate the dynamic character of individuals’ intercultural adjustment processes in which their own judgement plays an essential role. Furthermore, intercultural adjustment is not only restricted to dealing with adjustment challenges, as widely discussed in the existing intercultural literature (e.g., Anderson, 1994; Kim, 2005; Ward et al., 2001); it also involves making the best of potentially promising events or situations in ways that facilitate better adjustment outcomes (such as promoting intercultural interactions on a mutually respectful stance, reinforcing host friendships, and integrating more effectively into the host environment). The participants’ decision to confront others’ misconduct challenges some authors’ view (e.g., Chen, 2002; Chuang and Hale, 2002) that the Chinese prefer to preserve interpersonal harmony when dealing with conflict. Thus, this finding further suggests that the complexity of individual sojourners’ adjustment choices in intercultural encounters cannot be captured by drawing on pre-defined frameworks.

In certain intercultural friendships or conflict-based situations, the participants coped with the emotional effects of their intercultural experiences without changing the situation or their ways of thinking about the situation (i.e., emotion-focused coping; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984, cited in Anderson, 1994). Their previously acquired perspectives and norms regarding emotions in interpersonal relationships and emotional communication seemed to be the underlying reason for such a choice. They also chose to avoid certain insecure situations or situations in which embarrassment or isolation caused by a lack of intercultural interaction was anticipated. This demonstrates that the outcomes of the participants’ adjustments were multiple, as not all of them managed to cope with problematic intercultural situations in a productive way towards better integration into the host environment (e.g., avoidance may further limit

the participants' opportunities to expand their host network) or an enhanced emotional well-being (e.g., emotion-focused coping may not always be effective in easing the participants' depression catalysed by interpersonal conflicts).

*RQ3: What are the relevant sociocultural and historical factors that influence the development processes of these constructions or responses?*

The data in the four findings chapters demonstrate a variety of sociocultural and historical factors that influenced the development of the participants' constructions of and responses to emotions in their intercultural communication and adjustment processes.

From a sociocultural perspective, various interpersonal, situational, and structural factors played important roles in the participants' understanding of and responses to emotions.

To begin with, interpersonal factors including the three types of emotional connection in interpersonal communication – i.e. emotional contagion, emotional coincidence, and empathy – strongly influenced the participants' constructions and responses. Emotional contagion affected the participants' academic stress, intercultural apprehension, fears about losing 'face' in classroom discussions, and decisions on whether or not to seek emotional support from their parents. A lack of emotional coincidence regarding open-mindedness in intercultural interactions weakened the participants' sense of connection with the host people and discouraged their attempts to seek further clarification in misunderstood intercultural situations. The participants' empathy towards others also promoted a perspective that valued the importance of other perceptions of the world in addition to their own.

Moreover, situational factors also had an impact on the participants' experiences of emotions in intercultural communication. Close proximity with some non-Chinese students facilitated intimacy in their intercultural friendships for some participants, as it provided more opportunities for frequent contact. The presence of other Chinese students decreased the participants' intercultural apprehension and improved their interactional performance in

intercultural communication. Yet some participants avoided situations in which large groups of Chinese students were present, as they felt that they would be stuck with the Chinese group and therefore fail to engage in intercultural interactions in such situations.

Furthermore, the participants' constructions of and responses to emotions were impinged upon by structural factors centred on power issues. For example, the perceived low level of host receptivity, as well as the conformity pressure from the Chinese group, weakened the participants' sense of connection with the host society. Similar findings are also reported in Brown's (2008) study regarding a group of international postgraduate students' adjustment experiences in the UK. On the other hand, being in a disadvantageous position within power imbalanced encounters (e.g., during staff-student encounters, or as an isolated Chinese girl encountering a group of local teenagers) led some participants to avoid potentially threatening intercultural situations (e.g., staff-student conflict-based situations or situations in which one's personal safety may be compromised).

From a historical perspective, some participants' habituation with their existing Chinese network made them less willing to change their routine, thereby further reinforcing their inadequate sense of connection with the host people. Moreover, previous unsuccessful learning experiences (either their own or those of others) heightened some participants' academic stress levels; and their concern about losing 'face' in classroom discussions was influenced by their previous learning experiences in China.

Overall, the influential effects of a variety of sociocultural and historical factors on the participants' experience of emotions reveal the dynamics of the intercultural adjustment processes of individual sojourners, which cannot be predicted or fully understood by drawing on pre-defined frameworks or positions. In particular, discussions about the shaping effects of emotional contagion, emotional coincidence, and being in a disadvantageous position in

power imbalanced encounters on sojourners' affective adjustment experiences do not appear in the existing intercultural literature.

### **8.3 Theoretical contributions and implications**

The findings of this study contribute to the existing intercultural theories and studies in several aspects, which are outlined as follows.

To begin with, the findings highlight the significance of emotions in sojourners' intercultural adjustment as well as the interrelationships between this affective aspect and the cognitive and behavioural dimensions of the adjustment, which in turn adds to current understanding of intercultural adjustment in the existing literature in the following three ways.

First, the findings of this study enrich the current understanding of the affective aspect of intercultural adjustment and intercultural competence. The emotional benefits of host connections as revealed in this study – such as the easing of participants' academic adjustment stress and feelings of insecurity felt when encountering a new environment – are under-explored in the existing literature. For instance, Bochner et al.'s (1977) and Kim's (2005) studies have both emphasized the cultural learning value of host communication, in terms of helping sojourners succeed at university and perform effectively in task-oriented activities; yet, neither researcher has paid attention to its emotional benefits. The findings in this study also show the participants' value orientations (i.e., valuing friendly actions over friendly verbal expressions) and action tendencies (i.e., not overreacting in interpersonal relationships) in intercultural friendship development, as well as and their perceived limits in regard to tolerance and acceptance in intercultural communication. These issues were not mentioned in the existing intercultural literature. In addition, this study expands the conceptual domain of 'open-mindedness' as proposed in Chen and Starosta's (1997, 2000) intercultural sensitivity model. My analysis of the participants' constructions of intimacy in intercultural friendships suggests



that open-mindedness in intercultural encounters is not restricted to acknowledging, accepting, and embracing differences as argued by Chen and Starosta (1997, 2000), as it also involves developing Kim's (2005) proposed individualized self-other orientation in terms of discovering unique individual characteristics and valuing similarities between each other.

Second, the findings also improve the existing understanding of the intercultural adjustment process. The data suggest that intercultural adjustment involves a variety of other processes informed by emotion management, including cultural learning, suspending one's previously acquired values and beliefs in order to internalize new ways of thinking, boosting adjustment motivation, promoting self-confidence, managing emotional energy usage, and making value judgements. As such, the findings in this study enrich Kim's (2005) understanding of intercultural adjustment processes, which focuses exclusively on the cultural learning aspect of intercultural adjustment while neglecting other important affective processes, such as the management of adjustment motivation, self-confidence and emotional energy usage, as well as making value judgements. Moreover, the findings also indicate the significance of emotion management in informing sojourners' entire adjustment processes, as it was their judgement of 'good' or 'bad' based on their appraisals of emotions that guided their various intercultural adjustment actions. That is, they aimed to maintain or create the perceived 'good' events or situations, while simultaneously attempting to eliminate the 'bad'. By demonstrating how individual sojourners' understanding of their emotions influence or inform their overall adjustment experiences, this study therefore shows the connections between the affective, cognitive, and behavioural aspects of intercultural adjustment processes, thereby overcoming the drawbacks of Ward et al.'s (2001) ABC intercultural adjustment framework that treats these three aspects as separate processes operating without being influenced by each other.

Third, this study also suggests that intercultural adjustment has multiple facets. While the previous works mainly focus on the aspect of coping with and

eliminating adjustment problems or challenges (e.g., Anderson, 1994; Chen and Starosta, 2005; Kim, 2005), the findings of this study illustrate that intercultural adjustment also includes amplifying promising intercultural events or situations towards better adjustment outcomes, such as reinforcing host friendships, integrating into the host environment more effectively, promoting intercultural interactions on a mutually respectful basis, and so on.

As such, by exploring how emotion management has informed the participants' overall intercultural adjustment processes, the findings of this study add to the current understanding of the affective aspect of intercultural adjustment and show the complexity of the intercultural adjustment process, a highly demanding procedure that involves multiple issues and dimensions (as outlined above).

Furthermore, by adopting a social constructionism approach with the focus on examining the interactions between human agency and relevant sociocultural and historical contexts, the findings of this study elucidate the uniqueness and dynamics of the intercultural adjustment of individual sojourners in the context of international education. The findings have specifically illustrated the individual differences in terms of the extent of each participant's adjustment to the host environment. For example, some participants' concern about losing 'face' in classroom discussions had largely decreased, while others' apprehension persisted. Moreover, the findings highlight that the participants' constructions of and responses to emotions were shaped or influenced by a variety of interpersonal (e.g., emotional contagion decreased some participants' intercultural communication apprehension); situational (e.g., close proximity with non-Chinese students facilitated intimacy in some participants' intercultural friendships); structural (e.g., being in a disadvantageous position in power imbalanced encounters led some participants to avoid encountering certain threatening intercultural situations); and historical (e.g., some participants' habituation with their existing Chinese network further discouraged their attempts to connect with the host group)

factors. As such, it is evident that the participants' affective adjustment journey is not predictable, as their emotional experiences evolved as they interacted with others within specific sociocultural and historical contexts. This study therefore challenges the appropriateness of drawing on an essentialist approach when studying intercultural phenomena, an approach adopted in many of the existing literature (e.g., Chen, 2002; Kim, 2005; Gudykunst, 2005). Such an approach views the phenomena under study as stable entities with a 'definable and discoverable nature' (Burr, 2003, p. 6) while failing to observe the effects of individual agency and relevant contexts on the phenomena; such research therefore fails to capture the uniqueness and dynamics of individuals' intercultural adjustment experiences as illustrated by the findings of this study.

In sum, this study moves beyond the prevalent cultural/national framework in intercultural studies, providing important insights into the complexity, uniqueness and dynamics of intercultural adjustment phenomena. It contributes to empirical studies of the affective aspect of student sojourners' intercultural adjustment experiences (e.g., Brown, 2008; Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006; Robertson et al., 2000) by shedding light on the multiple issues, facets and processes involved during the intercultural adjustment process, a field which is largely neglected and under-explored in the existing intercultural literature (Spitzberg and Changnon, 2009).

## **8.4 Methodological implications**

This study has drawn on an ethnographic approach in order to examine Chinese students' experiences of emotions in intercultural communication, the value of which lies mainly in two aspects. First, compared with a large amount of previous research which adopted close-ended questionnaires as the main data collection technique, an ethnographic approach enables a more in-depth exploration of the complexities, dynamics, and uniqueness of individuals' meaning-making and responsive processes in regard to their emotions in

intercultural communication, without imposing previous understandings onto these processes. Specifically, by using open-ended questions in ethnographic interviews which are responsive to the sociocultural characteristics of individuals' affective intercultural communication experiences in specific research contexts, I was able to collect data about individual participants' adjustment concerns (including motivations, needs and goals, and value orientations) that underpin their understanding of and responses to emotions in intercultural encounters, which may not necessarily be captured in closed-ended questionnaires. During my data collection experiences, I gradually realized that personal judgments and skills of the ethnographer play crucial roles in influencing the quality of interviewing data (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). For example, my decisions regarding raising prompt questions or showing the visual prompt to the participants (detailed in Chapter 3) were case-sensitive, based on my judgements about whether sufficient information had been elicited or whether the participants experienced difficulty to verbalize their emotions in specific interviewing situations. Such an awareness of the complexity and flexibility of the ethnographic interviewing process, in turn, improved my understanding of the role an ethnographer plays in the fieldwork process: an active participant observer in the research context, who works with the participants in the field to develop a research strategy which is responsive to the specificity of the research context and situations, in order to produce emic and detailed understandings of the phenomena under study.

Second, being a natural 'insider' in the research field (in terms of a Chinese doctoral student and a live-in member of the hall of residence in the university under study) and conducting prolonged participant observations enabled me to gain a relatively detailed understanding of the sociocultural features of the research context, which helped me to better account for the contextual characteristics of participants' experiences of emotions in their intercultural encounters. Moreover, being as a Chinese international student myself also greatly helped me to build trust and a sound rapport with the participants,

which is especially useful for conducting this study due to the private and sensitive concerns of individuals' experiences of emotions. Without this insider's status, it would be difficult to imagine I could manage to get such rich data which cover a wider range of issues and reach a considerable depth of investigation: from the general field regarding the participants' encounters and engagements with the host environment, to more specific issues such as task performance as well as more private topics including values and beliefs related to interpersonal relationship development.

To sum up, the above methodological implications highlight the value of adopting an ethnographic approach, as well as the advantages of positioning oneself as a natural 'insider' in the research context in studying Chinese students' experiences of emotions in intercultural communication. These implications may also be useful for those who consider conducting similar studies in the future to gain some insights into the research processes and the researchers' experiences.

## **8.5 Social and educational implications**

The findings of this study also raise a variety of social implications for prospective Chinese international students, for British universities and university staff, and for intercultural education in higher education in general. The following sub-sections elaborate these implications respectively.

### **8.5.1 Implications for prospective Chinese international students**

As suggested by the findings of this study, Chinese students may encounter various academic and sociocultural adjustment issues during their studying abroad period. Therefore, when engaging in academic and social practices in the UK, it would be useful for prospective Chinese students to consciously develop their awareness and sensitivity of academic and sociocultural diversities (Chen and Starosta, 1997, 2000) as well as a willingness to learn from

other cultures (Byram, 1997), in order to integrate themselves into the host environment more effectively.

Moreover, as suggested by the findings of this study, studying abroad may raise various emotional challenges for Chinese students. It is therefore useful for students to constantly monitor their affective status and the use of their emotional energy when studying and living abroad, and to consciously manage these elements in ways that enhance their emotional well-being and promote healthy intercultural communication based on mutual respect and friendliness. Students would also benefit from adopting a more flexible and confident way of behaving when encountering seemingly threatening situations, so that their welfare and self-esteem in intercultural encounters may be better defended and preserved (Chen and Starosta, 1997, 2000). In addition, students should make an effort to expand and make the most of their social networks —both Chinese and non-Chinese—in order to create a supportive environment, which may be helpful in promoting their emotional well-being during their time abroad (Anderson, 1994; Kim, 2005).

### **8.5.2 Implications for British universities and university staff**

This study shows that Chinese students' negative experiences of emotions in intercultural encounters may be triggered by perceived intolerance and disapproval in the UK university contexts and/or difficulties in seeking help when encountering emotional problems. Hence, it is imperative for British universities to nurture a culturally understanding and responsive environment in order to ensure that the emotional needs and goals of international students are attended to and taken into consideration when hosting international students.

To begin with, it is important to promote university staff's sensitivity towards cultural and individual diversity, their acknowledgement of international students' emotional needs and goals, and their ability to respond constructively to these diversities, needs, and goals. As revealed in this study, Chinese

students would benefit from academic staff's awareness and understanding of the reasons for their academic challenges and stress. With the appropriate help and guidance from relevant academic staff, such stress can be eased and academic progress thereby achieved. It would therefore be useful to introduce training sessions for academic staff in the UK universities to develop this kind of awareness, understanding, and skills which enable them to be more sensitive about and responsive to the specific emotional challenges that international students face during their adjustment to the new academic environment.

Moreover, as suggested by some of the findings, students may find it difficult to find appropriate or useful emotional support as required, which calls for the importance of improving the supporting services that universities offer to international students. Specifically, universities need to ensure that they provide emotional support that is responsive to international students' specific emotional needs and goals in a safe way. Thus, recruiting support staff from international students' home countries may be a way of improving the quality of such services. Due to the staff sharing the mother tongue and probably many similar affective intercultural adjustment experiences with the students, they would be able to interact with students in a relatively stress-free and empathetic atmosphere in their home language, placing them in a good position to provide high-quality emotional support to students.

### **8.5.3 Implications for intercultural education in higher education**

This study highlights the importance of promoting intercultural education to larger groups of audiences (including international students; host students; university academic, support, and management staff), as well as expanding the focus and aims of intercultural education in higher education. As suggested by the relevant findings, it is essential to realise that intercultural communication is not a one-sided issue; and mutual understanding and respect in intercultural encounters cannot be achieved solely through the efforts of Chinese international students. In UK universities, the audiences of intercultural

education should therefore include everyone who works and studies in the university context, as competent intercultural communication cannot be achieved without the willingness to understand others and without open attitudes from both sides (Byram, 1997; Chen and Starosta, 1997, 2000; Deardorff, 2006; Gudykunst, 2005).

Moreover, the findings of this study indicate that intercultural education should also incorporate an emotional well-being focus, one that seems to have been neglected (Spitzberg and Changnon, 2009). As shown in this study, emotional well-being in intercultural encounters cannot be overlooked, as it may greatly influence Chinese students' intercultural adjustment orientations (e.g., their choice to maintain close contact with the Chinese group) and performances (e.g., amplifying positive intercultural events or situations and eliminating negative ones). Intercultural education programmes would therefore become more productive by introducing content that helps communicators identify their emotions in intercultural encounters; by examining the underlying important concerns that underpin these emotions (including motivations, needs and goals, and interests; Planalp, 1999); and by responding to such issues constructively with the aim of promoting healthy intercultural communication based on mutual understanding and respect, as well as enhancing communicators' emotional well-being in communication processes. This is a more holistic approach, as it encourages one to actively engage in intercultural encounters without compromising his/her emotional well-being. It may also motivate communicators to develop their intercultural competence from a more solid and sustainable position, due to its emphasis on the welfare and performance of *individuals* who engage in intercultural encounters.

## **8.6 Limitations of the study**

Like all studies, this study has its limitations, which are outlined as follows.



First, the focus of this study is to explore Chinese students' experiences of emotions in intercultural communication and adjustment in a UK university, and the findings of the study depict a one-sided story based on Chinese students' perspectives. Intercultural communication is not, however, a one-sided issue. Hence, voices and stories from other perspectives (e.g., host students, university staff) may provide a more holistic picture of and yield additional insights into the emotional aspects of intercultural communication and adjustment that occur *between* Chinese students and others. Nonetheless, by actively engaging in communication with non-Chinese people in the research field, I gained some opportunities to discuss their intercultural communication experiences with Chinese students, got to know some of their views in this regard, and used them as resources to facilitate my critical reflections on my own interpretations of the research data. In this way, this limitation is compensated to some extent.

Second, there is a gender imbalance in the participant group of this study. As shown in Chapter 3, the majority of Chinese masters students living in the hall of residence in which I recruited my participants were female with only two exceptions. Among these two male students, one did not meet the sampling criteria of this study as he was undertaking a research Masters programme rather than a taught one, and the other did not show any willingness to participate in my study. Hence, all the participants in this study were female. Although it would be sex-stereotyping to claim that different genders understand and respond to emotions differently, this gender imbalance of the sample may lead to some loss of information in the data. For example, information regarding Chinese male students' perspectives of certain gender issues that emerged in the data, such as how Chinese females are perceived (discussed in Chapter 6), is missing in this study.

Third, the limitations of this study also lie in the subjectivity of the data and its analysis. As the participants' understanding of their emotions cannot be directly observed, and as it is impossible for me to observe all of the

participants' affective adjustment behaviour in intercultural encounters, the majority of the data collected for this study came in the form of the participants' oral reports (via interviews). As a result, I needed to heavily rely on this form of data when developing my findings and analysis. Although I tried to make the most of the advantages of being a natural 'insider' in the research field in order to develop a sound rapport and mutual trust between myself and the participants, I cannot assume that the participants openly and honestly shared their experiences of emotions without any reservations due to the privacy concern of disclosing feelings to others, or that the participants' verbal accounts of their experiences 'accurately' reflect their actual behaviour which I was unable to observe directly. Moreover, despite the advantages of being a natural 'insider' in the research field, the potential danger of over-identifying with my participants and therefore losing certain critical insights into my data cannot be overlooked (as detailed in Chapter 3). This limitation of subjectivity can be compensated to some extent, however, by adopting the good practices of an ethnographer. For example, by making explicit the confidentiality of using and reporting the research data, as well as creating an emotionally supportive interviewing atmosphere (as detailed in Chapter 3), the participants may have felt safe to share their experiences of emotions openly and be encouraged to provide accounts that correspond with their actual behaviour. Furthermore, the use of multiple methods (i.e., ethnographic interviews and participant observations) and actively learning the non-Chinese' perspectives on communicating with Chinese students in the research field throughout the whole study process offered further insights and helped to inform my interpretations and therefore to maintain a critical eye when analysing my data.

## **8.7 Directions for future research**

As indicated by some of the findings of this study, current concepts and theories in Chinese affective communication literature are sometimes

misleading in grasping the complexity of individual Chinese students' affective communication behaviour in daily intercultural contexts. Therefore, future research could further explore the relevance of the current concepts or theories in the existing Chinese affective communication to interpret Chinese people's emotional intercultural communication experiences in this increasingly globalized world.

Also, the findings suggest that more similarities between one another were detected by the participants as their communication and connections with non-Chinese people developed to a deeper and more personal level, and discovering and focusing on such similarities had the positive effects of decreasing psychological distance and promoting connections between each other in intercultural communication. Future research therefore needs to pay more attention to similarities and their effects on intercultural interactions and relationship development. In this way, research will be able to move beyond the framework of focusing on cultural differences which is prevalent in existing intercultural theories and studies (e.g., Chen and Starosta, 1997, 2000; Spencer-Oatey and Xiong, 2006), and has the potential to depict a more comprehensive and realistic picture of intercultural communication in a daily life context.

Moreover, as discussed in the previous section, voices and stories from other perspectives involved in intercultural communication with Chinese students (e.g., host students and university staff) could be introduced in future research, so as to enrich understandings of Chinese students' experiences of emotions in intercultural encounters. A more gender-balanced sample would also be more desirable in future studies in order to shed light on whether gender has any effect on individuals' constructions of and responses to emotions in intercultural communication, a question which it has not been possible to explore in this study.

## **Conclusions to the study**

By providing a detailed description of the processes of Chinese students' emotional engagements in intercultural communication, this study has focused on understanding Chinese students' constructions and responses to their emotions in intercultural communication. In doing so, it has contributed to research and practice in the following ways. First, this study has provided empirical evidence of the affective aspect of Chinese students' intercultural communication and adjustment experiences in a UK university context guided by a social constructionist perspective, a field under-explored in previous studies. Second, it has enriched current understanding of the affective aspect of intercultural adjustment and intercultural competence, which is potentially useful in intercultural encounters for both student sojourners and researchers conducting similar future studies. Third, it has shed light on the uniqueness, dynamics and complexity of individual sojourners' intercultural adjustment processes, thus contributing a holistic, in-depth and critical understanding of intercultural adjustment phenomena. Fourth, this study has made suggestions on beneficial practices for all parties engaged in intercultural encounters in UK university contexts. Fifth, it outlines the value of a social constructionist approach in understanding student sojourners' experiences of emotions in intercultural encounters, as well as the experiences of the researcher when engaging in such studies. Finally, this study has provided evidences of the importance of adopting an individual affective perspective when examining intercultural phenomena, a perspective largely neglected in the existing intercultural communication research. The research outcomes therefore uncover a potential future research agenda.

## Appendix 1 First round interview guide (Chinese version)

[介绍：你好，非常感谢你接受我的采访。在本次采访中，我主要想了解一下在英国大学环境下，你在跨文化交流过程中的情感体验，以及这些体验对你在英国的跨文化交流的影响。]

1. 请你描述一下你来英国之后，在哪些学习环境中与外国人（学校教职员，学生，等等）有过交流？
2. 请告诉我当你在以上这些学习环境中与外国人（学校教职员，学生，等等）交流的时候，各自产生了什么样的感受（例如：幸福感、成就感、被认同感；迷惑、不被认同感、害怕、焦虑、孤单、无助……）？
3. 请你描述并评论一到两个令你印象深刻的、你在学习环境下的跨文化交流情感体验：
  - 描述：时间和地点；发生了些什么。
  - 你在这场经历中体会到了哪些感受？
  - 你觉得是什么让你有如此感受？（请从如下方面分析：你自己的心境；他人的态度或反应；环境的影响；等等）为什么你这么认为？
  - 针对这些感受，你相应地都采取了哪些行动？为什么？
  - 回顾整场经历，你觉得自己哪些方面做得不错（思想和行动上），哪些方面做得不够好？为什么？
  - 回顾整场经历，你觉得自己怎么做，可能会让你的感受以及你的整体体验更加积极一些？为什么？
  - 你觉得这场经历在哪些方面影响了你的跨文化交流体验？
4. 请评论一下你在住宿区的社交生活：
  - 描述你在住宿区里的朋友圈子情况。他们对你重要性都体现在哪些方面？当你和他们在一起的时候，你自己的感受如何？为什么你会有如此感受？可否简要举例说明？
  - 你觉得和外国人交朋友是否容易？为什么？你对此有何感受？针对这些感受，你采取了什么行动？为什么？可否举各简单的例子说明一下？
  - 你常参加住宿区里的社交活动吗？为什么？可否简要举例说明？
  - 你觉得在住宿区里遇到的外国人对你产生了怎样的影响？可否简要举例说明？
5. 请描述并评论一到两个令你印象深刻的、你在学习环境外的跨文化交流体验。
  - 描述：时间和地点；发生了些什么。
  - 你在这场经历中体会到了哪些感受？
  - 你觉得是什么让你有如此感受？（请从如下方面分析：你自己的心境；他人的态度或反应；环境的影响；等等）为什么你这么认为？
  - 针对这些感受，你相应地都采取了哪些行动？为什么？
  - 回顾整场经历，你觉得自己哪些方面做得不错（思想和行动上），哪些方面做得不够好？为什么？
  - 回顾整场经历，你觉得自己怎么做，可能会让你的感受以及你的整体体验更加积极一些？为什么？

- 你觉得这场经历在哪些方面影响了你的跨文化交流体验？

*[感谢你的回答。你还有没有其他想要告诉我的你觉得重要的体验或感受？]*

*[采访到此结束。非常感谢！]*

## **Appendix 2 First round interview guide (English version)**

*[Introduction: Hello. Thank you very much indeed for accepting my interview. In this interview, I would like to learn about Chinese Masters students' experiences of emotions in intercultural communication in a UK university context, as well as the implications of these experiences for their intercultural communication in the UK.]*

1. Please describe in what academic situations did you have communication or interactions with the non-Chinese (e.g., university academic staff, students, etc.) in the UK?
2. Please describe what kinds of feelings (e.g. happiness, success, approval, confusion, disapproval, fear, anxiety, loneliness, helplessness...) did you experience when communicating or interacting with the non-Chinese (e.g., university academic staff, students, etc.) in these academic situations?
3. Please describe and comment on one or two of your intercultural communication experiences in the learning environment that impressed you.
  - Describe: the time and location; what happened.
  - What kinds of feelings did you experience in this encounter?
  - What makes you feel like that? (Please analyse from the aspects of: your own experiences; others' attitudes and/or responses; the influences of the environment; etc.) Why?
  - What did you do with these feelings? Why?
  - In retrospect of this experience, which aspects do you think you performed well (in terms of thinking and actions), which not so well? Why?
  - In retrospect of this experience, what do you think you could do in order to make your feelings and the whole experience more positive? Why?
  - In what ways do you think the experience influenced your intercultural communication experiences?
4. Please comment on your social life in the hall of residence:
  - Describe your friendship network(s) in the hall of residence. In what ways are they important to you? How do you feel when staying with them? Why do you feel like this? Could you elaborate your points by giving me (a) brief example(s)?
  - Do you think it is easy to make friends with non-Chinese students in your hall of residence? Why or why not? How do you feel about that? What do you do with these feelings and why? Could you elaborate your points by giving me (a) brief example(s)?
  - Do you often participate in the social events in your hall of residence? Why or why not? Could you elaborate your points by giving me (a) brief example(s)?
  - How do the non-Chinese students you met in your hall of residence influence you? Could you elaborate your points by giving me (a) brief example(s)?

5. Please describe and comment on one or two of your intercultural communication experience outside the learning environment that impressed you.

- Describe: the time and location; what happened.
- What kinds of feelings did you experience in this encounter?
- What makes you feel like that? (Please analyse from the aspects of: your own experiences; others' attitudes and/or responses; the influences of the environment; etc.) Why?
- What did you do with these feelings? Why?
- In retrospect of this experience, which aspects do you think you performed well (in terms of thinkings and actions), which not so well? Why?
- In retrospect of this encounter experience, what do you think you could do in order to make your feeling and the whole experience more positive?
- In what ways do you think the experience influenced your intercultural communication experiences?

*[Thank you for all of your answers. Is there something else you feel important and want to tell me about it?]*

*[That's the end of my interview. Thank you very much!]*



## Appendix 3 Second round interview guide (Chinese version)

[介绍: 你好, 非常感谢接受采访。本次采访里我主要想要了解一下自从上次采访之后, 你在跨文化交流中经历的新的情感体验, 以及你现在对自己上次采访中提到的一些经历感想。]

1. 自从上次采访之后, 我想知道你在跨文化交流中是否有经历如下这些情感体验?

- 担忧/害怕
- 迷惑/不确定
- 亲密
- 孤单/思乡病
- (缺少) 安全感/放松感
- 被歧视
- 佩服/惊奇/震惊
- 失望/失落
- 无力感/艰难
- 感激/感动
- 尴尬
- (不) 被包容

(如果有的话) 请向我分享其中一些令你印象深刻的情感体验。请描述并评论:

- 该体验产生的: 时间, 地点, 相关事件
- 是什么让你产生这种感觉, 为什么?
- 针对这种感觉, 你都做了哪些应对(思想和行为层面)?
- 回顾这次感情体验, 你觉得自己上述哪些想法和做法, 让你此次跨文化交流经历比较正面? 为什么?
- 回顾这次感情体验, 你觉得如果重新来过的话, 上述哪些想法和作法可以改变一下, 以使这次跨文化交流经历更积极一些? 怎么改变? 为什么?
- 你觉得这次感情体验对你这次和今后的跨文化交流都有什么样的影响?

(如果有的话) 你是否回忆起了上次采访中你提到的类似体验?

• 相比之前的体验, 你觉得这次的感情更加强烈了, 还是减弱了, 还是几乎差不多? 因为什么原因?

• 在这次感情体验中, 你觉得自己的应对方式(思想和行为层面)和上一次相比是否有所不同? 如果有不同, 是怎样的不同, 为什么?

• 关于你上次的体验, 曾说如果再来一次, 你可能会做某些改变。我想知道你是否在实践中做了这些改变, 为什么? 你现在怎么看待之前的这些想法, 为什么?

(如果没有的话) 是什么让你不再有这种情感体验了? 为什么? (请结合 你上次采访中提到的相关体验加以评论)

2. 除了之前讨论过的这些体验, 还有没有其他在学习环境中让你印象深刻的跨文化交流体验?

- 描述：时间和地点；发生了些什么。
- 你在这场经历中体会到了哪些感受？
- 你觉得是什么让你有如此感受？（请从如下方面分析：你自己的心境；他人的态度或反应；环境的影响；等等）为什么你这么认为？
- 针对这些感受，你相应地都采取了哪些行动？为什么？
- 回顾整场经历，你觉得自己哪些方面做得不错（思想和行动上），哪些方面做得不够好？为什么？
- 回顾整场经历，你觉得自己怎么做，可能会让你的感受以及你的整体体验更加积极一些？为什么？
- 你觉得这场经历在哪些方面影响了你的跨文化交流体验？

3. 除了之前讨论过的这些体验，还有没有其他在学习环境外让你印象深刻的跨文化交流体验？（在学习环境中/学习环境外）

- 描述：时间和地点；发生了些什么。
- 你在这场经历中体会到了哪些感受？
- 你觉得是什么让你有如此感受？（请从如下方面分析：你自己的心境；他人的态度或反应；环境的影响；等等）为什么你这么认为？
- 针对这些感受，你相应地都采取了哪些行动？为什么？
- 回顾整场经历，你觉得自己哪些方面做得不错（思想和行动上），哪些方面做得不够好？为什么？
- 回顾整场经历，你觉得自己怎么做，可能会让你的感受以及你的整体体验更加积极一些？为什么？
- 你觉得这场经历在哪些方面影响了你的跨文化交流体验？

*[感谢你的回答。除了我们之前说的所有这些，还有没有其他你认为重要的并且愿意告诉我的内容？]*

*[采访到此结束。非常感谢!]*

## **Appendix 4 Second round interview guide (English version)**

*[Introduction: Hello. Thank you very much indeed for accepting my interview again. In this interview, I would like to learn more about your experiences of emotions in intercultural communication since our last interview, as well as your further comments on some of your previous experiences of emotions mentioned in the last interview.]*

1. Since our last interview, I wonder if you have encountered any intercultural communication situation in which you feel:

- concerned/worry/afraid
- confused/uncertain
- intimate
- lonely/homesick
- (in)secure
- being discriminated
- impressed/surprised/shocked
- disappointed/upset
- impotence/difficult
- appreciated/touched
- embarrassed
- (not) being tolerated

*(If yes)* Please outline some of these experiences of emotions that impressed you by describing and commenting on:

- the time and location; what happened;
- why did you have such a feeling;
- what did you do with this feeling, and why;
- In retrospect of this experience, what do you think makes you feel positive in this experience? Why?
- In retrospect of this experience, what do you think you might wish to make a change in order to make your experiences a bit more positive, if you were in this situation again? Why?
- In what ways do you think the encounter influences your intercultural communication experiences?

*(If yes)* Have you recalled any similar experience you mentioned in our last interview?

- In this situation, was your feeling stronger or weaker than the one in your previous experience, or was it almost the same as the previous one? Why?
- Did you do anything different from your previous experiences? If so, in what way and why? If not, why not?
- For your previous experiences, you mentioned a few points on what you would do differently in encountering the situations again. I wonder if you have any comments on these points now, if you have actually done these things, and why.

*(If no) What made you no longer have such a feeling? Why? (Please discuss this in relation to your previous experiences mentioned in our last interview.)*

2. Since our last interview, have you encountered some other intercultural communication situations that impressed you in the learning environment, which were not mentioned just now?
  - Describe: the time and location; what happened.
  - What kinds of feelings did you experience in this encounter?
  - What makes you feel like that? (Please analyse from the aspects of: your own experiences; others' attitudes and/or responses; the influences of the environment; etc.) Why?
  - What did you do with these feelings? Why?
  - In retrospect of this experience, what do you think makes you feel positive in this experience? Why?
  - In retrospect of this experience, what do you think you might wish to make a change in order to make your experiences a bit more positive, if you were in this situation again? Why?
  - In what ways do you think the encounter influence your intercultural communication experiences?
3. Since our last interview, have you encountered some other intercultural communication situations that impressed you in the college environment, which were not mentioned just now?
  - Describe: the time and location; what happened.
  - What kinds of feelings did you experience in this encounter?
  - What makes you feel like that? (Please analyse from the aspects of: your own experiences; others' attitudes and/or responses; the influences of the environment; etc.) Why?
  - What did you do with these feelings? Why?
  - In retrospect of this experience, what do you think makes you feel positive in this experience? Why?
  - In retrospect of this experience, what do you think you might wish to make a change in order to make your experiences a bit more positive, if you were in this situation again? Why?
  - In what ways do you think the encounter influence your intercultural communication experiences?

*[Thank you for all of your answers. Is there something else you feel important and want to tell me about it?]*

*[That's the end of my interview. Thank you very much!]*

## Appendix 5 Key information about interviews

The following table summaries key information about the two rounds of ethnographic interviews, including the format, interview date and duration of each interview:

	First round		Second round	
	-Unstructured interviews		-Semi-structured interviews	
Participants	Interview dates	Durations	Interview dates	Durations
<b>A</b>	21/12/2012	104 minute	6/8/2013	91 minutes
<b>B</b>	22/12/2012	137 minutes	4/8/2013	94 minutes
<b>C</b>	21/12/2012	135 minutes	20/7/2013	120 minutes
<b>D</b>	22/12/2012	145 minutes	30/7/2013	124 minutes
<b>E</b>	24/12/2012	154 minutes	9/8/2013	77 minutes
<b>F</b>	23/12/2012	180 minutes	22/7/2013	99 minutes
<b>G</b>	11/1/2013	82 minutes	24/7/2013	69 minutes
<b>H</b>	4/1/2013	119 minutes	15/8/2013	66 minutes
<b>I</b>	5/1/2013	116 minutes	14/8/2013	64 minutes
<b>J</b>	6/1/2013	78 minutes	12/8/2013	45 minutes
<b>K</b>	5/1/2013	122 minutes	13/8/2013	54 minutes
<b>L</b>	13/1/2013	126 minutes	29/7/2013	98 minutes
<b>M</b>	14/1/2013	150 minutes	1/8/2013	131 minutes
		<b>Average: 127 minutes</b>		<b>Average: 87 minutes</b>
				<b>Total: 2782 minutes</b>

**Table 2 Key information about the two rounds of interviews**

It can be seen from the table that the average duration of the first round was around 2 hours while the second round was less than 1.5 hours. This was because compared to the first round, the second round was more focused as part of its contents were structured around the themes emerged from an initial analysis of the first round interviewing data.

## **Appendix 6 Observation issues**

I focused on the following issues during my participant observations, in order to see how the participants acted or were likely to act given their experiences of emotions in their intercultural encounters.

1. The time and location of the events;
2. What the events are about;
3. What is happening in the events:
  - how do interactions take place;
  - the ways people act in interactions;
4. The cues of emotions in the events:
  - facial expressions
  - vocal cues
  - body language
  - verbal messages
  - action cues

## **Appendix 7 Information sheet for participants**

Dear Students,

As part of my PhD work at Durham University I am doing a study approved by Durham University's Ethics Advisory Committee. The title of the study is:

### ***An ethnographic study of how Chinese students in a UK university understand and respond to emotions in their intercultural adjustment***

This study will be open to all Chinese taught masters students living in X<sup>7</sup>. I would like my subject group of students to be as diverse as possible and I am therefore asking you to participate in my study. The study will include two rounds of interviews (conducted respectively in the Christmas and Summer vacations in the academic year 2012/2013) and observations carried out by myself, and will involve recording of the interviews for the purpose of looking back on what has been talked about. I have enclosed a consent form that I would be grateful if you could sign and return it to me as soon as possible.

The study will describe Chinese taught masters students' experiences of emotions in intercultural communication in a UK university context. It will be based on interviews and observations with Chinese taught masters students who live in X. It aims at revealing how do they perceive and manage emotions in intercultural communication both in classrooms and in X, as well as what factors may influence their experiences of emotions.

I want to find out your views and opinions on your own intercultural communication experiences when you study and live in the UK as well as how the environments and your own background may have influenced your views and opinions.

The outcome of my study will hopefully provide a clearer picture on Chinese students' intercultural communication experiences in UK universities, thus provide guidelines for UK universities on improving the quality of Chinese students' studying and living abroad experiences.

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<sup>7</sup> X refers to the name of the hall of residence of the university under study.



Thanks so much for taking the time to read this and I hope you will decide to participate in my research.

Many Thanks!

Weijia Zheng

November 2012

## Appendix 8 Consent form

<b>TITLE OF PROJECT:</b>	
<b><i>An ethnographic study of how Chinese students in a UK university understand and respond to emotions in their intercultural adjustment</i></b>	
<i>Please cross out as necessary</i>	
Have you read the Participant Information Sheet?	YES / NO
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and to discuss the study?	YES / NO
Have you received satisfactory answers to all of your questions?	YES / NO
Have you received enough information about the study?	YES / NO
Have you been informed that the interview will be recorded and of the intended use of the recordings?	YES / NO
Do you consent to the use of the recordings for the desired purpose of the study?	YES / NO
Who have you spoken to?	Miss Weijia Zheng
Do you consent to participate in the study?	YES/NO
Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study:	
* at any time and	
* without having to give a reason for withdrawing and	
* without affecting your position in the University?	
	YES / NO
<b>Signed</b> .....	<b>Date</b> .....
(NAME IN BLOCK LETTERS) .....	

**maintaining good situations**

Name	Sources	References	Created On	Created By	Modified On	Modified By
○ 回信	0	0	19/01/2015 12:22	A	19/01/2015 12:26	A
○ 当下	0	0	19/01/2015 12:20	A	19/01/2015 12:20	A
○ 安全受到自己的影响,因为有人保护,所以不用担心	1	1	10/11/2014 15:40	A	19/01/2015 12:25	A
○ 用大数回避对方的情绪	0	0	03/01/2015 06:59	ZW	03/01/2015 07:10	ZW
○ 从外人,没有感情中找得出需要回避对方的情绪并且自己主动维持对方才可能成为朋友	1	1	29/12/2014 13:58	ZW	27/11/2014 12:42	A
○ 而本人,则对自己不丁的确实是数据话题也可以表示出兴趣多,向对方以快速互动和交流	1	1	07/08/2014 18:40	A	27/11/2014 12:42	A
○ 和陌生人交流的时候努力适应该样子的行为能力,努力尝试新的方法去进行互动的过程	1	1	12/03/2014 16:40	A	26/07/2015 17:20	A
○ 对陌生人的回应:稍微好一点,听他的介绍并学到东西	1	1	13/08/2014 12:29	A	23/12/2014 14:58	ZW
○ 对陌生人的回应:保持礼貌的回应可以拉近彼此的距离,并且多一些有效的交流而	1	1	08/03/2014 13:58	A	23/12/2014 13:58	ZW
○ 自己对陌生人的回应:保持礼貌的回应,因为保持礼貌的态度非常关键,和真诚,是为自己创造重	1	1	20/09/2014 18:21	A	23/12/2014 15:52	ZW
○ 保持外国同学主动性的话要谨慎的回应:尊重文化和价值观差异,以及分享时的态度和行为方式来引起对方的共鸣,	1	1	03/01/2015 06:46	ZW	23/12/2014 15:52	ZW
○ 用同样的方式来回应对方的情绪	0	0	19/01/2015 12:26	A	19/01/2015 12:26	A
○ 用积极和主动参与的态度打海对方的期望和回应的方向为增量	0	0	03/01/2015 07:23	ZW	03/01/2015 07:25	ZW
○ 用积极和主动参与的态度打海对方的期望和回应的方向为增量	0	0	03/01/2015 06:56	ZW	03/01/2015 07:03	ZW
○ 长时,用积极和主动参与的态度打海对方的期望和回应的方向为增量	0	0	03/01/2015 06:53	ZW	03/01/2015 06:55	ZW

Reference 1 - 2.19% Coverage

我回他发个信息, 你觉得自己已经知道怎么做, 是以你们两个互动的时候做的工作原  
因?

恩, 可能他自己发的信息到不了我的手机, 我发回他的时候, 他就说自己是怎  
么样的, 然后我就发了回去, 然后就结束了。然后, 就是这样。

对了, 能问一下什么叫做这个? 这个是什么意思?

可能就是问, 他发的信息, 他发的信息, 然后我们发了回去, 然后他们就  
也在聊, 然后他们就发了回去, 然后就结束了。然后, 就是这样。就发给他  
正吧。

217

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